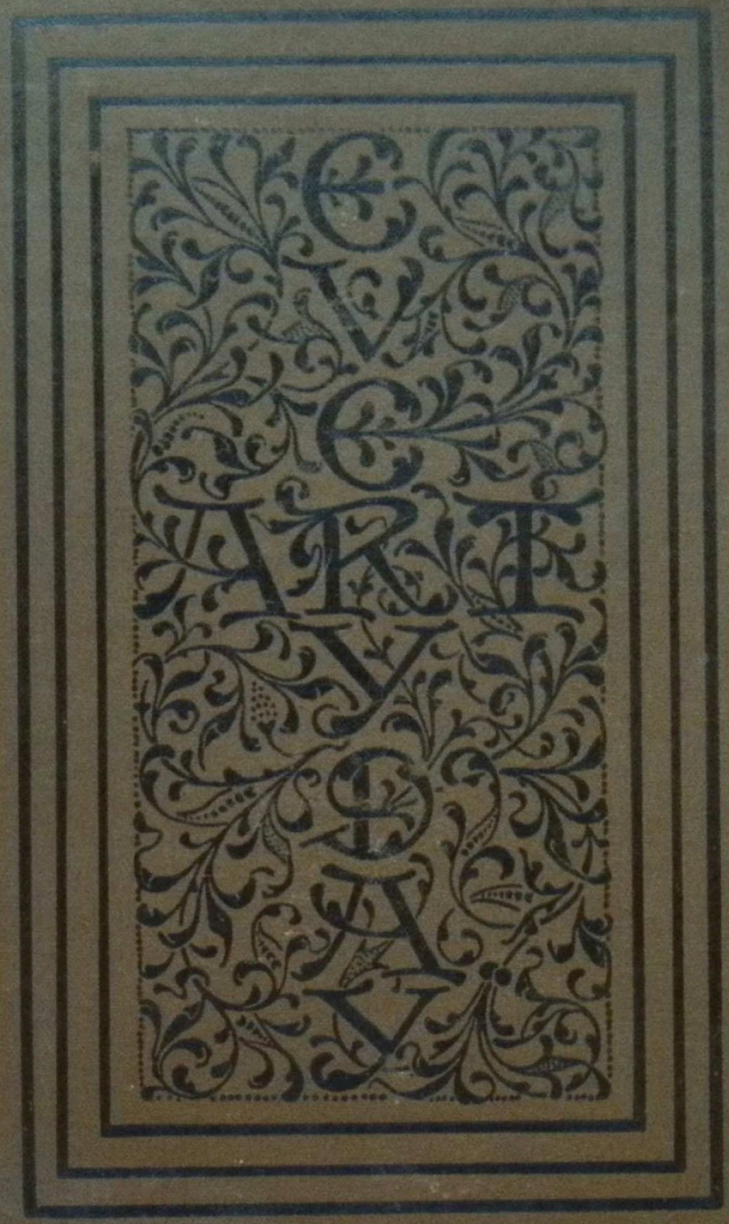
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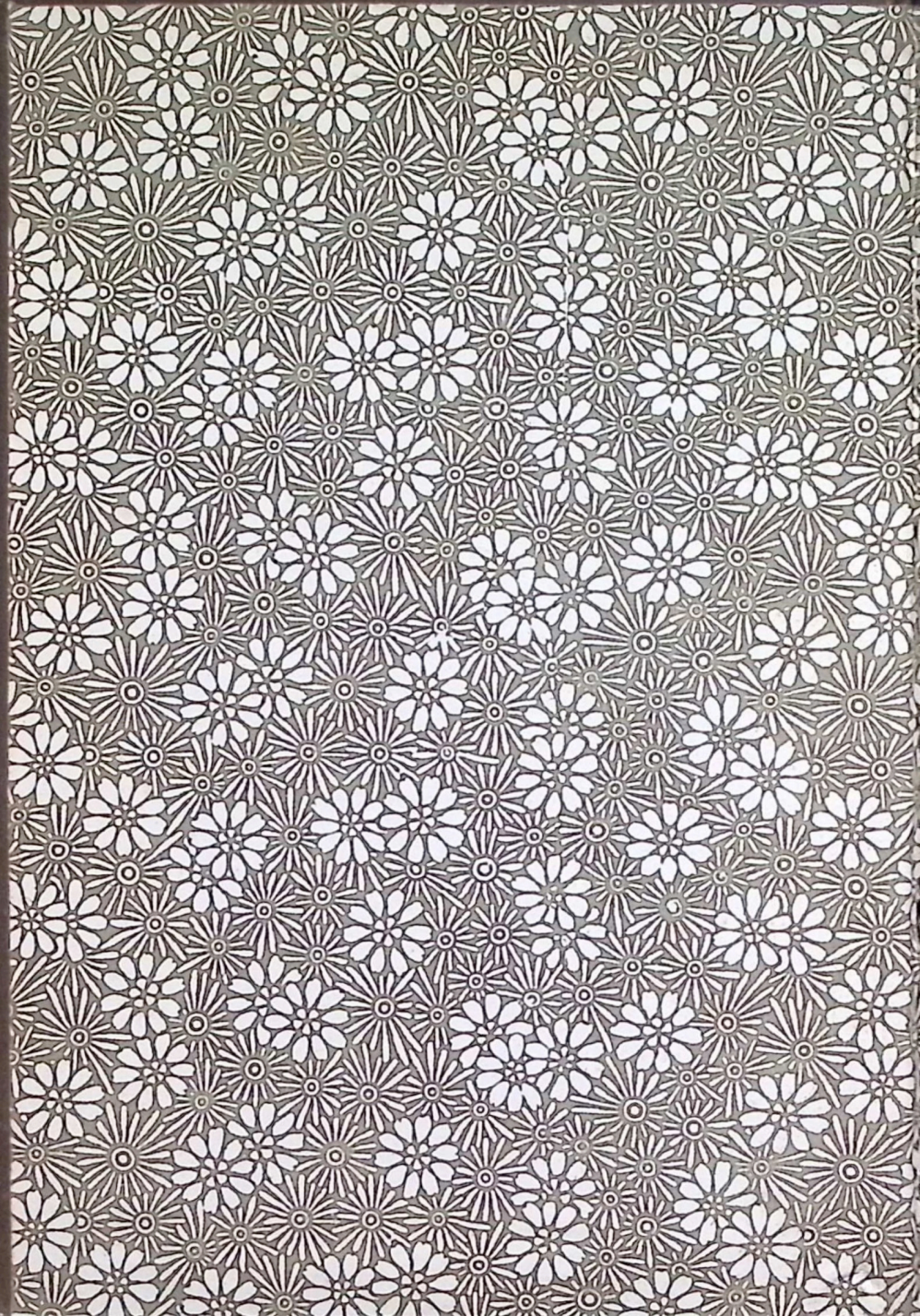

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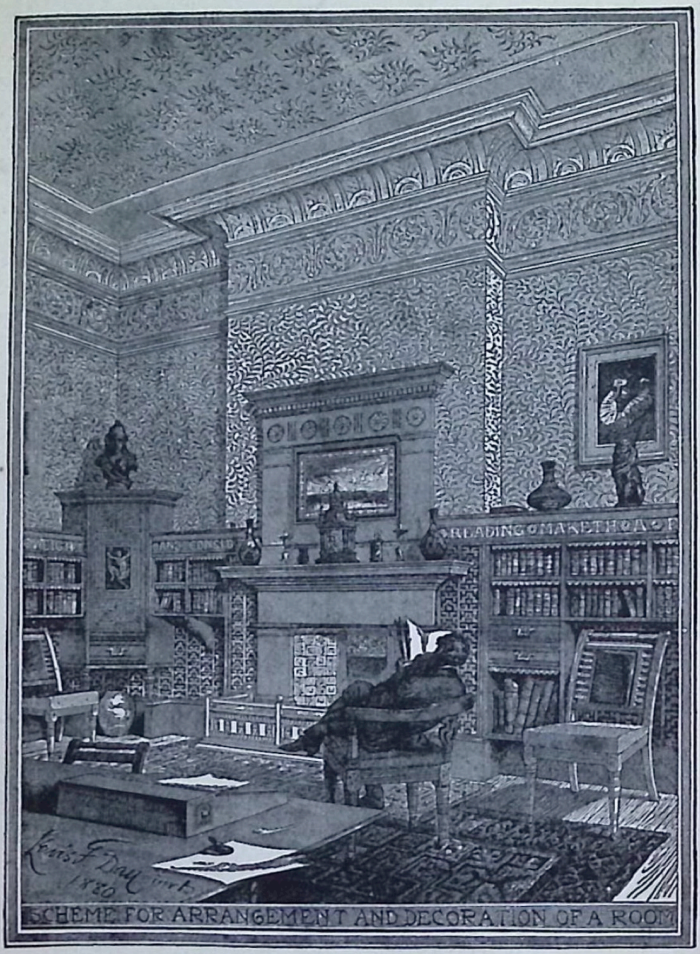

SCHEME FOR ARRANGEMENT AND DECORATION OF A ROOM

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INTRODUCTORY CHAPTERS ON THE ARTS NOT FINE

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"*De gustibus est disputandum.*"

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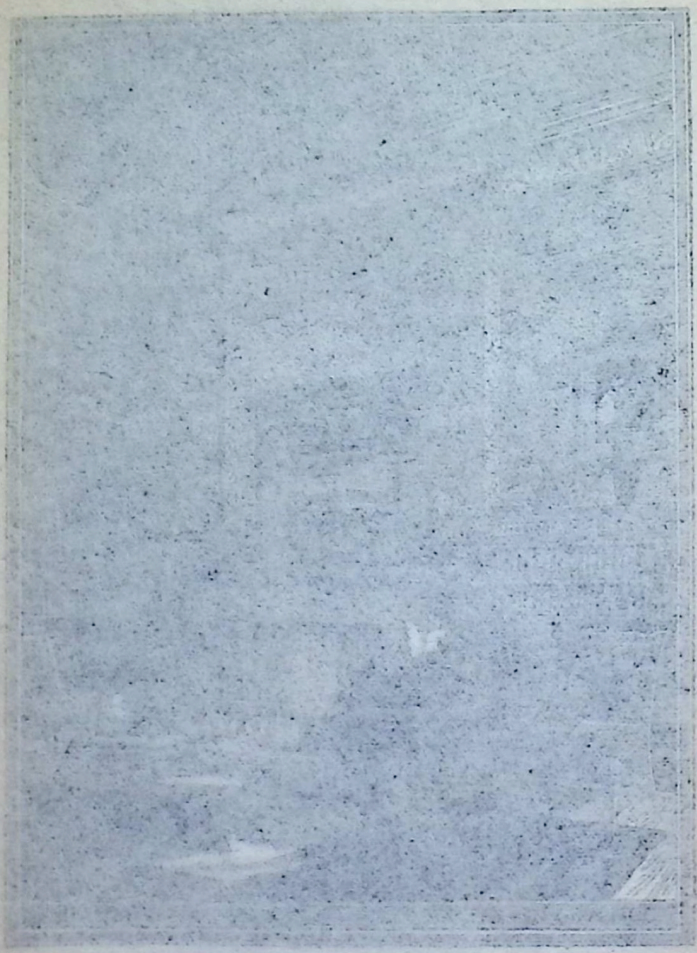

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TO THE READER.

THE original edition of "Every-day Art" being out of print, it occurred to me to issue the first (and, as I think, the only permanently interesting) part of it, in the form of an introductory volume to the "Text Books of Ornamental Design," without, however, substantially reducing the number of illustrations.

When it came to revising the text for the press, I found on every page something which I thought might be better said. And so it has resolved itself into my writing the greater part of it anew.

LEWIS F. DAY.

13, *Mecklenburg Square, London*, 1890.

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EVERY-DAY ART.

ON ORNAMENT.

"Orno, Ornas, Ornat, Ornamus, Ornatis, Ornant."

RNAMENT is the art of every-day. The great picture galleries may be likened to the temples of art, whither devout worshippers, and others less devout but no less anxious to pass for pious, resort only at intervals. So, also, a treasured painting may be the shrine at which a man offers up in private the incense of his admiration. But every day and all day long we breathe the atmosphere of ornament. There is no escape from its influence. Good or bad, it pervades every object with which our daily doings bring us in contact. We may, if we choose, keep away from picture galleries and not look at pictures; but, our attention once turned to ornament, we can no longer shut our

eyes and decline to take heed of it, though there are all about us forms of it which every cultivated man would evade at any cost if he could. It may be to us a dream of beauty or a nightmare, but we cannot shake it off. At every turn in life we come face to face with some fresh phase of it.

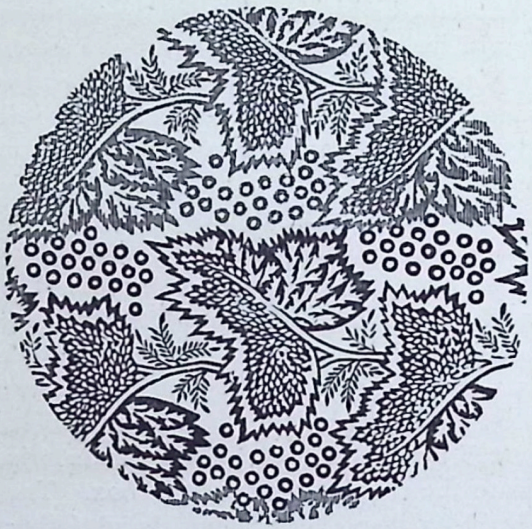
The question of ornament is, therefore, neither insignificant nor one that has significance only for the wealthy few. Neither is it a matter which concerns only those who take some interest in art, since we are all of us, however little inclined towards the arts, alike compelled to ornament our dwellings, our belongings, and our persons.

Imagine for a moment how a man would set about furnishing a house without art. In the first place the house itself would need to be built for him, and not a door, or window-frame, or chimney-piece, not so much as a fire-grate, door-knocker, or area-railing, but would have to be made to his express order. The furniture, from the door-scraper to his easy chair, would in like manner have to be designed for him; and it is doubtful whether the markets of the known world would suffice to supply the necessary utensils, implements, and household vessels, all innocent of ornament. Were this at last accomplished, the first time he entered it he himself would introduce, within its walls the inevitable decoration—unless indeed, he put off on the door-step the clothes that

the usages of society have determined to be necessary appendages to the natural man. The cut of his coat, or the rib of the cloth, the polish of his boots, the curve of his hat-brim, the starch of his linen, the knot of his necktie, the shape of his studs, the pattern of his watch-chain, the ring on his finger, the umbrella in his hand, even the all-necessary money in his pocket, would any one of them be enough to destroy the artless simplicity at which he vainly aimed. A lady in every-day walking costume would introduce a small museum of ornamental detail.

You cannot so much as accept the present of a box of Elvas plums without at the same time receiving food for thought on ornament. There is the pattern of red and green printed on the paper with which it is covered, bearing upon it distinctly the stamp of a period, and illustrating the very simplest form of printing. A further problem is suggested by the relation of the alternate stripes of colour to the circular shape of the box. Then we find inside a disc of cut paper, delightfully naïve in its perforation, and exemplifying to perfection the adaptation of design to the method of its execution. No less suggestive of the scissors are the shreds of tinsel mingled with the plums; and the barbaric richness of their effect in the box is admirable. But there is a warning in them, too. They have a way of adhering to the fruit; and you relish the tinsel less when it gets between your teeth.

The love of decoration is by no means a characteristic peculiar to the Victorian age. Ornament dates back to the rudimentary stage of the human race. If we were to trace it to its beginnings we should find ourselves in Eden—or wherever else

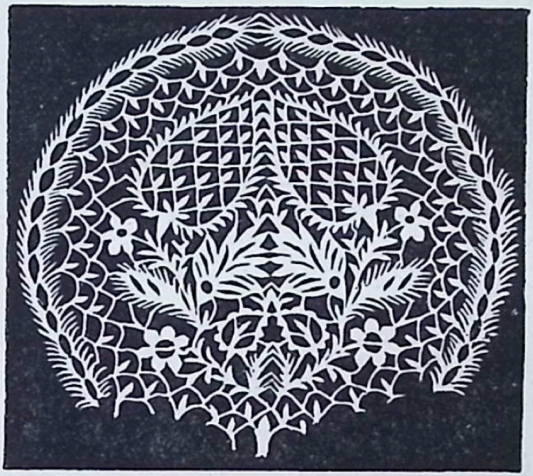


Top of Plum-box.

the scientists will allow the human race to have had its origin. To-day it is omnipresent among us; and we can scarcely conceive a "coming race" without ornament.

The association of art with every common object of daily use seems to be in the natural order

of things. It was so in Ancient Greece and Rome, and during the Renaissance. The ruder Gothic craftsmen and the earlier Egyptians and Assyrians were no exceptions to the rule. In the East the cunning artificer delighted to find in every branch of handiwork excuse for the elaboration of



Cut paper ornament.

ingenious ornament. Even among the aborigines of Mexico, New Zealand, and the South Sea Islands, we find that every opportunity for ornament was seized, necessity guiding it into the way it should go. It was only during a period of almost utter dearth of art amongst us, in the eighteenth and first half of the present centuries, that the idea

was ever entertained that use and ornament were in any sense antagonistic. The result of attempting

Savage ornament.

to draw the line between use and ornament, as though the two were not to be reconciled, was that

ornament, which is irrepressible, struck out on its own account, and, unrestrained by sober use, indulged in all the extravagance and excess which the better taste of recent years has, we cannot yet say ended, but at all events interrupted.

Perhaps we may assume, since there is usually some ground in fact for every fiction, that it was the perversion of ornamental art among civilised nations, subsequent to the degradation of Renaissance design, which led to the idea that use and ornament were incompatible. The recurrence to a better style of decorative design among us in this generation, and a truer appreciation of the end and object of ornament, would soon overturn this fallacy; so that not even the most practical and prosaic person would be able to rest in the belief that use and ornament are independent one of the other. For decoration is, or should be, art controlled by common sense.

It is beyond dispute that the influence of our every-day surroundings must affect us; possibly they influence us much more powerfully than we are accustomed to suspect. That some among us should be doomed to live without beauty is one of the curses of our civilisation; such unfortunates may find relief in deadening the sense of beauty within them; even then it can never be quite the same thing to them whether they live in the midst of beauty or of ugliness.

Æsthetic culture is not the high-road to all the

virtues, and, indeed, certain of the vices have been known to infest it. I doubt very much whether it "*emollit mores, nec sinit esse feros.*" Neither, on the other hand, is there any special grace in ugliness, as puritanism would have had us believe. Art is only utterance. It must express something; and the vital question is, what does it express? The daily association with honest, manly, real work, with graceful fancy, individual character, and refined art, must exert on us an influence less demoralising than the continual contact with falsity, pretence, and affectation. The fact that we may be wholly unconscious of the influence about us does not destroy its effect. The fresh air is tonic, whether we feel it to be so or not; and the germs of disease that emanate from a foul atmosphere are none the less fatal, though our nostrils be not sufficiently delicate to detect the poison we breathe.

The low condition to which ornament had fallen during the first half of the century, accounts fully for the slight esteem in which it has come to be held; and nothing short of reform in design will ever restore to decoration the prestige that attached to it as a matter of course in days when art and handicraft were scarcely distinguishable, when no artist disdained to do work which is now left to the mechanic—possibly he owed his distinction to success in it. Of late years there has been something of a reaction in respect to the appreciation of

the accessory arts; and, inasmuch as this interest is no new thing, but a recurrence to that catholic appreciation of the arts which has characterised all periods when art has thriven, one is encouraged to hope that better times really have come again. To-day's interest in decorative art may be just a fashion. It is more encouraging to believe that yesterday's apathy was only an episode in the history of popular opinion.

TASTE.

"I know what I like."

IT is characteristic of decorative art that it depends almost as much upon the critical as upon the creative faculty of the artist. More than any other art it depends upon taste; and by that test it stands or falls. It is taste that determines—what is it that it does not determine in decoration? It settles in the first place whether there shall be decoration at all, how much of it, of what kind, where introduced, and how executed. It prescribes

what is wanted, what is admissible, and what is becoming. Not one of these questions can be solved without reference to it. Every work of applied art is a problem, and the most important factor in its solution is taste.

This, too, is worthy to be remembered, that whilst we judge of a man's power by the high water-mark of his achievement, we measure his taste less generously, not even according to the average of his work, but by the record of its lowest ebb. When once an artist has succeeded in producing a powerful impression, it survives many failures. We point to his great work and say: that shows what he can do! But a single false step in taste may be fatal; it is difficult to believe any more in the certainty of a judgment that has once been flagrantly at fault; we think always of the man's failure, and wonder: what must be the taste of a man who can have let that pass?

In the tacit assumption of taste on the part of every educated person there is unconscious recognition of the supremacy of the faculty. So firmly is this infatuation rooted in men's minds that to question their authority in this respect is taken as an insult. Is not every Alderman a man of taste? We have all of us met ere now the worthy gentleman who "knows what he likes"; he announces that incontrovertible fact with a self-satisfaction which seems to imply that really it is no slight merit in him that he knows no more. It would be,

of course, the height of rudeness to suggest that his preference did not of necessity argue excellence. But why is it that in this matter of art a man, even while admitting that he knows nothing of the subject, will protest that he is none the less competent to give judgment? He would hesitate with regard to any other subject to pit his ignorance against the special knowledge of an expert.

The confusion in men's minds is owing in part to a confusion of the different senses in which the word is used. Bad taste may mean bad breeding, and no one cares to be accused of that. Again, taste may be understood to signify liking, and in respect to liking every man must be a law to himself. There is no disputing on that point. Even though it be raw spirit that we prefer to mellow wine, or crude combinations of red, blue, and yellow that we like better than any subtle harmony of colour, we have a perfect right to our preference. Whether by announcing it we show discrimination or expose our ignorance is another matter.

In reference to art there should be no mistake about the meaning of the word. Liking is one thing, and taste quite another. One may thoroughly dislike a work at heart, and yet acknowledge that it is good; and the faculty that enables us to recognise its merits, apart from our own likes and dislikes, is taste.

The more competent the critic, the more readily he will acknowledge that he is not unerring. His

judgment must, he knows, be to some extent biassed by personal predilection. It is reserved for the average ignoramus to assume calmly that his likes and dislikes constitute good and bad in art—only in art: in other respects he is sane enough. He does not argue with his solicitor or pretend to prescribe to his physician. He goes to them for advice, and whether he acts upon it or not, the fact that he is prepared to pay for it implies that he attaches some value to it. It is true that society does not insist that a man should be versed in the law or in medicine, and that it does demand that he should be able to converse about art. Society, by the way, appears to be quite unconscious of the nonsense he talks when he begins. If for a moment he could but see himself as artists see him!

The unaffected expression of a man's preference is valuable in proportion to his experience and character; and there is no particular reason why he should keep it to himself; but the way in which those who never held a brush since the days of their childhood venture to determine what is good and bad, "well painted," or "out of drawing," shows not only that they are unaware of the depth of their own ignorance, but that they are quite incapable of learning. Lookers-on see the best of the game, it is true, but not unless they know its rules. For every fault that the mere *dilettante* really discovers in a work of art, there are possibly a dozen merits that he fails to detect; and, on the other

hand, if certain works in which he finds great merits are not highly esteemed by the expert, such poor opinion is probably warranted by faults of execution he has not the experience to see. It would be only decently modest in him to assume that, whenever he differs from an artist as to a matter of art, which he has himself not particularly studied, he is in the wrong; for the artist probably has studied it. To go beyond the expression of personal opinion, and say what is good or bad, is to assume the function of critic, an assumption only justified by knowledge.

There is no more common pretence than that of a knowledge of art; and though the affectation is evident at once to those who really know, it is difficult to prove to those whom it has duped how hollow it is. The best in art can only be demonstrated by appealing to faculties which comparatively few persons possess, and fewer still have cultivated. Ignorance mostly pays a penalty of some sort: it is that way we buy our experience. The man whose palate is not so delicate but that he enjoyed the liquor he drank last night, may be convinced, if only by the logic of this morning's headache, that it was not of the best, and begin to mistrust his judgment accordingly; but the indulgence in cheap art pays no such obvious toll—there is no headache afterwards. A man's natural vanity, the want of discernment that permitted the purchase of a poor work of art, and the ungraciousness of the task of

pointing out to him the worthlessness of his bargain, together, make his enlightenment all but impossible. The thing remains before his eyes, still further to vitiate his sense of what is beautiful. "After all," says the popular fallacy, "it is a matter of taste!" But taste is not a personal matter. It is no more mere preference than judgment is mere opinion. It is as rare as it is supposed to be common. It implies not only artistic feeling and critical power, but their cultivation too. Failing artistic sympathy, we miss the very aroma of the art we profess to judge; without critical faculty we are inevitably led away by our feelings; and without experience we are in danger of mistaking molehills for mountains, never perhaps having seen such a thing as a mountain.

The artist always shows something of himself in his work. The cloak of art does not altogether disguise the man under it; and, though he should pose as the personification of impersonality, his very pose, the mere fact of his posing, tells tales. Silence sometimes betrays as much as speech. But if this be true of the artist's personality, it is still more true with regard to his culture; and it is the evidence in a man's work of natural artistic tact, *plus* cultivation and experience, that we distinguish as taste.

It might well be supposed that taste, the controlling as distinct from the creative or manipulative faculty, might be a common attribute of the more refined and cultivated class; and it is so far true

that a man of mere culture is far more likely to err on the side of harmless commonplace than to break out into outrageous extravagance. But the fact remains that the mere looker-on does not educate himself in anything like the degree that the worker does. You may look at a thing fifty times, and carefully too; yet when you come to copy it you find that you had not seen half that was there. With rare exceptions, a man who has not been himself a practical workman, never really gets to know much about workmanship; he has neither experience nor training; his theories are at second hand; his judgment is mere opinion.

How astonishingly crude is the criticism of persons who are, except in art, cultivated! They do not even know what an artist means when he talks of vulgarity in art. A loud voice or coarse expression will offend them, just as mincing affectation or pretence may do; but they would be startled to be told that the brutal workmanship, the crude colours, the mechanical affectation of finish, and the cheap pretentious ornament, which are to be found broadcast in their drawing rooms, are simply vulgar. They have perhaps a general idea that anything rather strong in effect approaches vulgarity, and scarcely dare to like it till it has received the stamp of general approval. Their estimate is very much according to the catalogue: a picture is of more account than a panel, and a panel of more account than a pattern

—much as the grammarian defines the masculine to be more worthy than the feminine, and the feminine more worthy than the neuter, apart altogether from the merits of man, woman, or thing.

How many (or how few) can appreciate the self-restraint a craftsman shows in his work? It is just this self-restraint, this holding always a strict balance between facility and fitness, that constitutes the crowning difficulty of design. Power is proverbially impatient of restraint, and taste, in its turn, is always half afraid of force; yet it is on the reconciliation of this impatience with this fear that admirable decoration must depend. Some ornament is too feeble to provoke hostility; none is so powerful as to be independent of taste.

Nor can we confidently depend either on the teaching of nature or of ancient ornament to direct us, for it is taste that first enables us to turn their teaching to account. What is admirable in nature is not always equally to be admired in art, and the affectation of what was once true in taste ceases to be tasteful. The modern attempts to reproduce what was beautiful in old work are for the most part coarse or meaningless, or both at once. Compare the tenderness of the heads by Early Christian painters, Fra Filippo Lippi for example, with the insipidity of the saints of modern manufacture; or the earnestness of Gothic sculpture with the heartlessness of our parodies of it. No matter how grotesque the carving of old gurgoyles and stall-

seats, we delight in the quaintness, though there be nothing else to admire in them; we are not easily shocked by the inconsistencies of the simple mason, who believed in something very like the hobgoblins he introduced into his work.

We accept even the angels of the Gothic carver, because we believe in his sincerity; but it is his faith rather than his art that is sacred to us. On the other hand, the nineteenth century affectation of such *naïveté* is doubly hateful to us, in that we look back tenderly on the past, in that we look hopefully forward to the future. Such archaism would not be tolerated for a moment in literature. We are content to enjoy the curiously homely and prosaic imagery of the religious poetry of the seventeenth century without travestying it. Fancy a modern imitation of George Herbert!

It is curious to observe how little correspondence there is between the progress of civilisation and of taste. Each appears to have gone its own way quite independently of the other.

Much of the reticence of archaic ornament is due to a kind of intuitive tact, which reveals, however, rather the simplicity of the workman and the rudimentary nature of his appliances, than any self-restraint in him. His sense of fitness is undisturbed by any idea of even the possibility of imitating natural effects. He is quite unconscious of the excellence of his ornament. He prefers, when he once sees it, the most tawdry of European

importations to anything that is produced by his tribe. His sense of what is beautiful, moreover, stops abruptly short at what is absolutely subordinate to use. The battle-clubs and paddles of savages, their basket-work and mats, are admirable; but their idols are, without exception, monstrously ugly, and their ideal of personal adornment culminates in the distortion and mutilation of their natural bodies.

The more cultivated art of the Mohammedan nations is proportionately more refined and beautiful. Enforced obedience to the law of the Prophet was in itself a restraining influence. Religion served as a bridle to Asiatic extravagance, and made Moresque art almost too evenly excellent.

In the art of the ancient Greeks, the most exquisite taste of all is shown; and in their case it must be ascribed mainly to the degree of culture to which they had attained.

It would seem that the quality of taste, as revealed in the art of the past, may be the outcome either of simplicity, of submission, or of culture. Seeing that the times on which we have fallen are out of tune with simplicity, and since the sceptic spirit of the age has determined that obedience in us shall not be blind, it would seem as if modern taste must be rooted in culture.

PAST AND PRESENT.

"New lamps for old!"

HE opinion a man may hold concerning old work is by no means a fixed quantity: it progresses, in a somewhat curious order. We begin in our ignorance by condemning it very likely as barbarous or old-fashioned; on further acquaintance, we find ourselves attracted to it; and by degrees we are taken captive by the charms of antiquity, and are even liable to be smitten at last with a blind pedantry that can see no beauty in anything that is new. To recover from this stage of love-sickness argues a degree of native energy and independence which not all of us appear to possess.

There is no knowing how the art of the past may affect a man, or what lesson he will draw from it. Very often he is mastered by some phase of art which most men thought was long since dead, but

with life enough in it, at all events, to allure and fascinate him, and take, perhaps, entire possession of him, until he is no more himself but the exponent of a style gone by. One artist finds in the very idea of style a hindrance; it stands in his way, and he cannot get over it. Another masters a style and bends it to his own will, compelling it to conform to his individuality and express his thought. Others there are, again, who make use of it only as foothold for some fresh venture in art.

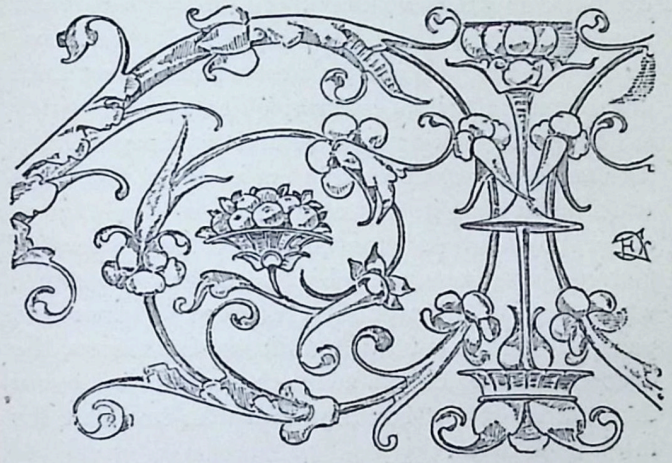
Something is to be said for the devotee who kneels before the past and worships. But retrospect is not art; and it is more in the spirit of the nineteenth century to accept a given style as a starting-point—not as an end. Those who went before have left tracks which will be helpful to us. We should be wasting time, were we to insist on finding out always a way for ourselves where they have trodden for us a sure path; but there is no occasion to follow them into regions which we don't want to explore, or to confine ourselves entirely to the beaten way. It is well to have always a pretty clear idea as to the direction in which the high road lies; we can wander, then, widely from it without losing our bearings; but if we are in search of something that is not quite commonplace, it will serve us perhaps more often as a line to depart from and to return to than strictly to follow. Old work should be not much more than a starting-point for the art of any but a student. In a certain

sense we are all of us students, and always; but we need not, for all that, suppress what little of originality there may be in us. There is great danger lest the antiquarian interest in what is old overgrow in our mind the appreciation of what is beautiful.

One may know a good piece of smith's work when it occurs, without having traced the progress of the art from Tubal Cain downwards; one may appreciate the glory of colour in stained glass, without being familiar with all that has been done from the twelfth century to the present day; and, in truth —we may whisper it lowly—the men who most truly appreciate are not the antiquaries, pedants, and compilers of catalogues, but the actual artists whom art encourages and inspires, the possible artists whom art delights and satisfies. Imagine the dead looking down in spirit on their work—would any one of them feel profoundly grateful to the critic who had assigned to him, with whatever accuracy, his precise position in the ranks of art? Yet, if that spirit had any of the artist left in him, every thrill of genuine pleasure that his work gave to an onlooker would vibrate in him again. Still, it is always those who know best who best appreciate; and in proportion to their knowledge would their appreciation be grateful to the artist's ghost.

The historic "styles" of ornament might perhaps be called only so many fashions of the past; but,

at all events, they were not merely of a day or of a "season." The fashion of a century ceases to be a fashion—or, if a fashion, is no longer contemptible. The ancient styles were not pushed and puffed into ephemeral existence; they had time to grow,



Style or Fashion of François 1er.

develop, culminate, and die at last a natural death: the new style developed itself as naturally from their remains as a fresh plant from the seed of last autumn.

Each succeeding phase of ancient ornament embodied in some degree the ideas of the people among whom it arose, although the ideas, like the forms of ornament, may have been by no means

original, and the people themselves may have had no consciousness of any particular idea at all in the art about them. From the evidence of pots and pans alone, it would be quite safe to declare a remote people simple or sophisticated, unrefined or cultivated, sensuous or ascetic, or whatever their character might have been. In every case their ornament would betray them, and all the more surely that they did not for a moment suspect that, in the manufacture of ordinary objects of every-day use, they were writing their own history for posterity. The testimony of decorative art is, again, the more valuable in that it represents, not a single class of wealthy and perhaps cultivated purchasers of pictures, sculptures, and objects of luxury, but the whole people. Everybody had need of pots and pans, and all the multitude of common things, the decoration of which was so much a matter of course that the artist was scarcely aware he had left his mark upon them.

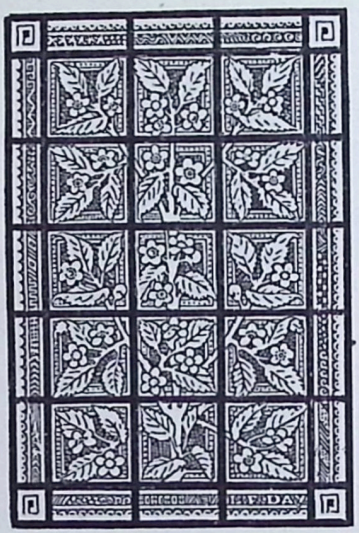
Whatever we may think of the various styles of ornament that have come down to us, it is impossible for us to leave them altogether out of account. They are the various languages in which the past has expressed itself; and unless in our foolishness we fancy we can evolve from inner consciousness something at once independent of and superior to all that has been done before our time, we must begin by some study of the ancient principles and practice. It will save time in the end. Does any

one flatter himself that he has only to take one bound into successful originality. He is much more likely to arrive there safely by stepping back a pace or two and gathering himself together for the leap.

If there were no other reason why we should know something of past styles, it would be sufficient that, in the absence of any marked national style among us at present, we have taken to "reviving" in succession all manner of bygone styles. The ornament of to-day is to so great an extent a reflection, in some instances a distortion, of old work, that one cannot well discuss it without reference to its origin. These "revivals," irrational as they are in themselves, may not be without good results. There is such a wealth of old work accessible to us nowadays! What modern facilities of travel do not enable us actually to see, modern processes of reproduction bring home to us, and modern methods of publication press upon our attention. There is no possibility of escape from its influence.

Modern outcome of Greek ornament.

We are compelled to such study of the various styles that, when we shall have arrived at reason and begin to express ourselves naturally in the language of our own day, it must tell to some purpose in our work.



Window showing Gothic and Japanese influence.

It is only by the widest stretch of courtesy that the greater part of modern ornament can be called design at all. There is very little but what is borrowed. Some few of the more prominent decorative artists of our time have, indeed, established what is to be recognised as a style of their

own ; but their respective manners are probably as much the result of the study of Mediæval, Japanese, Moresque, or Renaissance art as of their own personality. It seems as if our only opportunities for the exercise of individuality were, first, in the selection of a model, and, next, in the use we made of it. The days are past in which men worked in the manner traditional to their craft, knowing no other. We have no traditions, excepting perhaps those of the particular workshop in which our apprenticeship was served ; and we soon learn that these are not as the laws of the Medes and Persians.

We are perplexed from the very beginning by the thought of what style we shall adopt. One authority declares with confidence that the one true and living style is the Gothic, another is equally certain that the only worthy aim in art is Classic perfection ; one suggests that we should put our trust in Eastern art, another deifies the Cinquecento ; and there are equally fervent apostles of the 18th century and the later French schools.

The very multitude of voices indicates that, the truth is, not one of these ancient styles is quite suited to our time. Some of them are worn threadbare, and of those that are still serviceable it is not possible that any one will fit our every modern want and fancy. The assertion of any universal fitness reminds us rather too forcibly of those all-potent medicines advertised to cure anything, from an

Nineteenth-century Renaissance.

ache to apoplexy. It is strange that men who would be the last to put faith in any patent pill, and believe in its efficacy against all the ills that flesh is heir to, should be so eager to swallow the nostrum that this or that particular style of bygone art is bound to suit their case whoever they may be.

Nearly all old work has something to teach us, but the more deeply we study it the more thoroughly we realise that side by side with the special merits of each style lie its inherent defects. The grace we find wanting in one style is atoned for by a strength and character absent from the other. One excels in form, another in colour, a third is symbolic, and a fourth sensuous; each is best in some particular, even though its individual excellence be of no very high order.

It would be beyond the truth to say that the principles which underlie all old work are the same. Those principles are as diverse as the temperaments and characters of the races among whom they were developed. The Egyptians showed what could be done within the bounds of severe convention; the Greeks carried refinement of form to perfection; the Romans revelled in richness; the Byzantines indulged in a brilliance of colour that is yet always barbaric; the Arabs gave themselves up to the subtle interweaving of intricate detail; the artists of the Gothic period combined religious sentiment with energy of execution; and those of the Renaissance returned to the worship of beauty for its own

sake. We should seek in vain elsewhere for the all-pervading symbolism that runs through Egyptian ornament, the purity of line that characterises Greek detail, or the sumptuousness that belongs to Roman scrollery. Inasmuch as all nations and all ages differ, their expression in ornament differs; and inasmuch as all nations and all ages are alike, they express themselves alike in their every-day art.

Though one race of men may be naturally disposed to remain in the grooves of tradition, and another always eager to start off on a new track, there is no race of men among whom all are exactly alike; everywhere there have been skilful and clumsy, conscientious and dishonest workmen, and in every period of art there has been good work and bad.

Fortunately for us, the latter has most of it gone the way of bad work and perished; so that, although in ancient art collectively we have not an unerring guide, it is mainly the good that remains to us. The winnowing of old work has been done for us by the sure hand of Time.

The art of design does not consist in the slavish reproduction of classic, mediæval, or other detail. It is not enough that we are familiar with antique forms, we must make ourselves masters of the old methods, that we too may go and do, not likewise, but as good or better, if we can. Our success is more than uncertain, and, to speak frankly, we

must admit that few of us are likely to approach the perfection of the best old work; but if we rely wholly upon our imitative faculty, failure is a foregone conclusion. Any one with a spark of invention in him will prefer even a chance of pre-eminence to the certainty of a second place. Slavish work is always lifeless work, and a copy is after all only a copy. "Not to Contradict and Confute; Nor to Beleeve and Take for granted; Nor to Finde Talke and Discourse; but to weigh and Consider"—that is the spirit in which the artist should approach old work. By all means let us study it, and that earnestly; but do not let us be greedy over it: as Bacon said again of books, it should "be chewed and digested." Many an archæologically-minded designer (if reproduction may be called design) has before now suffered from a surfeit of old instances which it was hopelessly impossible for him to digest. What wonder if the productions of such a one have all the inconsistency of a nightmare!

Archæology is a study in itself, and one that is of considerable assistance to the artist; but it is not art, nor will it serve as a substitute for it. Individuals may affect a particular period of ancient art, but most men feel the absurdity of attempting to resuscitate among us to-day the ornament of any other time or people. What if it be the art of Egypt, in its rigid stateliness; of Greece, in its monotonous perfection; of Rome, with its dangerous richness? What if it be Byzantine or Gothic

ornament, earnest but bigoted; Mohammedan design, as exquisite as it is limited? What if it be of old Japan, with its facility not always restrained by taste; of the Renaissance, that is responsible for the most beautiful and the most degraded in decorative art? In no case is it possible that such art can be sufficiently in sympathy with us to serve our needs of every day.

Reaction against the pedantry of modern Gothicism was but natural. Men were so sick of trying to build nineteenth-century dwelling houses according to the precedent of thirteenth century churches and abbeys, that even the affectation of what is called "Queen Anne" architecture was welcome, because, being really a sort of no-style-in-particular, it allowed some freedom to the artist. The promptitude with which that liberty has been used is an indication, perhaps, of a temper to which a fusion of past styles into something like really characteristic modern work may not be altogether impossible.

Although each style of ancient art has its intrinsic merit, the value of any particular style is relative, and depends upon our immediate object in study. We should not expect to find in an Egyptian mummy-case any very marvellous degree of airy grace or elegance, nor look for quaintness and piquancy in the sculptures of the Parthenon; we should not go back to ancient Rome for purity of style, nor to Byzantium for beauty of figure-

drawing; we do not expect to find freedom in Moorish art, or restraint in Japanese. If the experience of time past is to serve our turn, according to the nature of our own work we must refer to the art of the particular period or people that afforded the most perfect examples *of that kind;* according to our particular difficulty we should refer to the particular style of art in which it had been most satisfactorily solved.

Notwithstanding the beauty of a great deal of old work (and some of it is so perfect that the mere study of its details is a sort of education in itself), there is infinitely more to be learnt from the study of ancient processes than from the worship of antique forms. Half the

Goldsmith's work of the best type.

D

charm of a design vanishes at once when we discover that it is only a reflection of something better that is past and dead. We grow tired of the continual repetition of the same beautiful but long-since lifeless forms. On the contrary, our respect for the consummate art, the admirable tact, the masterly treatment of material, that we find in the best old work, can but increase with closer familiarity; here indeed we have something that is not only worthy of study, but capable of impregnating our work with no little of its own reality and manliness.

It must be confessed that we have made no very wise use of the abundant wealth of old work now so easily accessible to us all. For the most part we have abused our opportunities of study: we have been content to copy the handwriting of the past without attempting to decipher the meaning of the message conveyed in it. For all our boasted enlightenment, its real significance remains dark to us. Not that we are so dull and stupid as would seem, nor that we are simply lazy, but that we are in such haste—haste to outstrip our fellows, haste to reach notoriety, haste to make money,—that we snatch at what is obvious, and have no time to seek beneath the surface for what is best worth having.

The good that modern decoration has derived from the accumulation of examples of ancient art around us in this generation is relatively small; it is out of all proportion to what it should and would have been, if we had made intelligent use of our

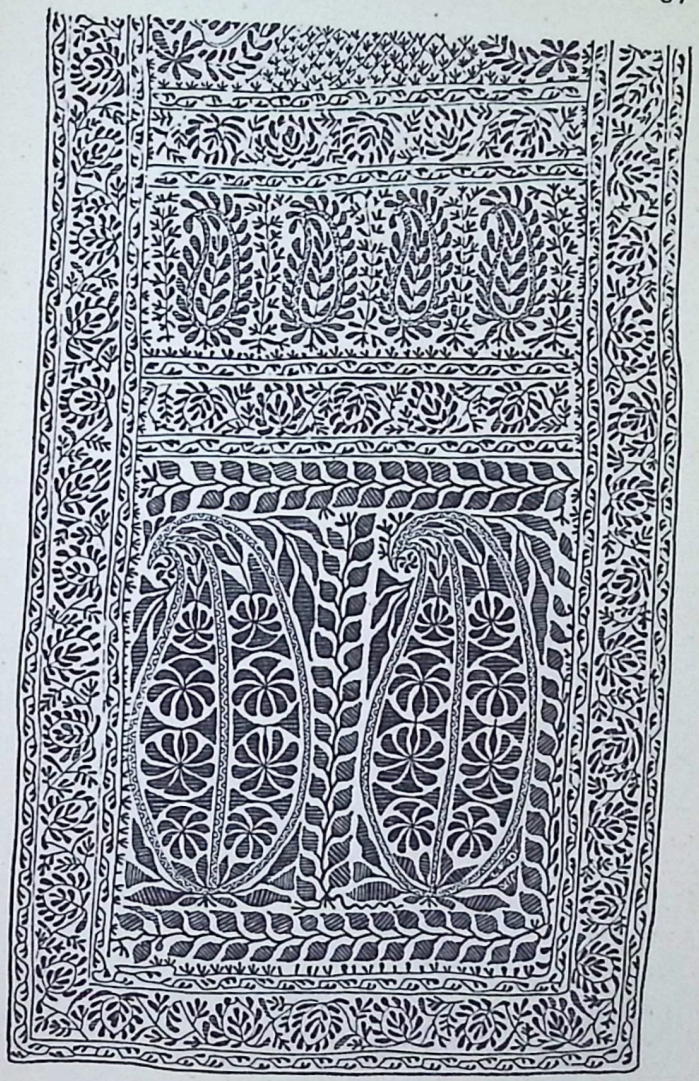
opportunities. Manufacturers reproduce, at preposterous prices, laborious copies of inexpensive oriental pottery which is chiefly admirable for the ease and directness with which the artist potter produced so satisfactory a result, whilst they remain in contented ignorance of the secrets of the superiority, so far as art is concerned, of Eastern ware to the products of Staffordshire. In spite of old work, in spite of common-sense almost, they still hold, in all the sincerity of ignorance, to the faith of the amateur—that finish is only so much smoothness, that the highest art consists in the most minute elaboration. They think to imitate Etruscan terra-cotta by copying antique vase shapes, and *printing* upon them mechanical travesties of the bold and beautiful forms that flowed from the brush of the Greek so freely, that it is difficult to say exactly how much of the credit is due to the artist and how much to the brush. So again with our even-tinted imitations of old Persian carpets, which miss all the charm of the originals. And so in all our manufactures.

There is perplexity in the wonderful variety of the styles of art with which we are familiar, but there is something more than perplexity: each reflects some light on the other. With all the difference between the various styles of ancient ornament, there are certain characteristics common to the best, of whatever race or period. A critical examination of old work will go far to show that

the best in each style is akin to what is best in all others; even as its authors, though they differ in type and feature as Chinaman differs from Greek, are all built upon the skeleton common to humanity. And as all races go to make mankind, all styles go to make ornament, in which are embodied the unwritten laws of decorative design. Not that they were perhaps ever consciously followed. The grammar is compiled from the language; the language is not constructed on the lines of the grammar. Nevertheless, what is to be gathered from the practice of the masters of design may conveniently be formulated for the guidance of beginners. All arbitrary rules and dogmas are in the nature of leading-strings, irritating to a degree when once we can do without them; but small children cannot run alone, and every one is a child in art to begin with.

Of modern ornament the most perfect is that which is not modern, that is to say, such Indian, Persian, Japanese or other Eastern art, as is traditional, and has changed little or not at all for centuries.

All that we know about the ornament of the future is that it must be influenced by what has gone before. What that influence will be is matter for speculation. When we think of the diversity between ancient and modern modes of life and thought, we cannot but feel that the expression of ancient and modern art must of necessity be



Modern traditional ornament.

different. Yet, when we come to reflect how near we are to the most remote of our race, and how little of novelty there is in art, we are more disposed to believe that the elements of all possible art lie buried in the ruins of what has been.

The past is there to teach us, the present is here to work in. What may be the due relation of ancient precedent to modern practice is a question not easily to be solved; the designer in his work solves it as best he may.

THE NATURE OF ART.

"Art is man's nature."

EVERY day fresh ink is shed in the war perpetually waging between the adherents of Nature on the one side and of Art on the other. May-be the words are only so much waste of energy, —there have been graver battles to as little purpose since the world began—may-be the combatants, like other and more deadly adversaries, are warring under the universal banner of misapprehension, the two factions fighting for much the same idea, only under a different name.

The real difference of opinion is as to the use or abuse of nature, as to the lesson to be learnt from her, the one school maintaining that the whole secret of art lies in strict fidelity to fact, the

other seeking to subject all art to the bondage of a narrow conventionality. The obstinacy of each party is encouraged by the adherence of the other to its own dogma; and both fallacies are the more invincible through the alloy of truth that is in each.

The relation of art to nature depends very materially upon the nature of the art in question. Painter and decorator represent the two extremes of art, and there is no more prolific source of confusion than to identify one with the other.

The art of Michael Angelo and his great predecessors was all more or less decorative; painter and decorator may be said to meet in them; but it is only on the summit of art that the pictorial and the decorative join hands. One may start with the idea of painting a picture, and end by making it conform to all that is necessary to decoration. Or one may begin with a decorative scheme, and carry it to the furthest point of pictorial perfection. Parnassus, that is to say, may be climbed from two opposite sides; and a man is classed as painter or decorator, not according to the height he may have reached, but according to the side from which he set out. Compare Mr. E. F. Brewtnall's decorative picture, opposite, with the somewhat pictorial panel decoration overleaf, and with the more formal frieze decoration on page 44, and the medallion panel facing it.

In ornament the question is not whether it should be natural or artificial, but: what is the

I'anel picture.

Picturesque panel decoration.

natural way of treating ornament? what is the artistic way of rendering nature? It may be assumed that no one seriously believes that art is nature, and that nature is art. However dependent the one may be upon the other, they are always distinctly two. Nature is before all art, and above it, and beyond. All that gives us satisfaction in ornament existed first of all in nature, though not of necessity in the animal or vegetable kingdom. Human nature counts for something. But we have long since ceased to be the unsophis-

ticated children of nature. Art, though it be only *second* nature, is now at least quite natural to us; and the discussion of human affairs from the point of view of primeval simplicity, interesting though it may be, does not go far towards the solution of any real difficulty.

The world has determined that it cannot do without ornament. If it be contrary to nature, and nature to it, nature, in so far as she is refractory, must be brought into subjection. Is not our whole life artificial? Whosoever takes service under art must keep in the ranks. To say that it is art which should serve under nature, is to say that ornament has no business to exist; for ornament very clearly insists upon the precedence of art.

It is not here a question of easel pictures. The painter is restrained only within the limits of his own ability and the four sides of his picture-frame. The decorator has comparatively little liberty of invention, and yet no excuse for the lack of it. He can put in no plea for unreasoning realism. His business is to add the grace of ornament to something predetermined, if not already in existence; and the opportunity for naturalism is of the rarest occurrence. He may not say all that he could say. He has not even the privilege of silence. His art is, so to speak, in submission to one continual cross-examination. Whatever he does is more or less in answer to the question; how in this instance can art and beauty best be reconciled? His rank as a

Frieze decoration.

decorator will depend upon his habitual success in the solution of that problem.

The copying of natural forms is no solution, but an evasion, of the difficulty. If we would pay to nature that sincerest flattery of imitation, we should begin by adapting to the purpose in hand, as she inevitably would do, every form that we adopt from her. That so-called ornament which is only a copy of nature is no more natural than it is workmanlike or intelligent. Ornament is in its nature an accessory art, and must, in common sense, be reduced to harmony with the architecture, craft, or industry with which it is associated.

Medallion panel.

To compare a picture with nature, or decoration with a picture, is in either case, to judge it by a false standard, that is to say to misjudge it. Judge ornament after its kind, consider it as ornament, and you cannot fail to see that its most essential characteristic is fitness.

There are some to whom the necessary adaptation of natural forms to ornamental conditions appears to be a mere stopping short of nature. In a sense that may be so. Painting is no doubt a stopping short of relief, sculpture a stopping short

of colour, music a stopping short of words, poetry a stopping short of reality; and like them, decorative art stops discreetly short. But this apparent "stopping short" is really selection, a deliberate and wise rejection of this or that for the moment unimportant fact, in favour of the all-important impression at which the artist is aiming.

Ornament may be called, if you will, a stopping short of imitation, as breadth a stopping short of detail. All art stops short of nature, and that intentionally; else we should have no drawings in black and white, no sculpture without colour, no painting without actual modelling. The barber's block and the tailor's dummy would go nearest to our ideal; and, with the aid of clockwork, no need even to stop short of motion. The coupling of science and art need be confined no longer to the newspaper heading, but might become at last an accomplished fact. What a picture rises before the imagination —Art yielding at length to the fond embrace of Mechanism!

Art is compromise. The most literal of painters reject many truths for the sake of the one truth they desire to enforce. Only children and amateurs attempt to represent all that is before them. A painter makes up his mind what effect it is that he wishes to produce and sacrifices all else to that. So does the decorator But the sacrifices due from him to purpose, place, material, and fitness are greater. He has not merely to choose between

beauty and truth, or between one truth and another; but whatever is in any way contrary to his decorative purpose, that it is his bounden duty to suppress. Half the art of the decorator is in the

Cabinet panels, stopping short of light and shade.

faculty of selection. It is not so easy to strike a balance between beauty and use. Let any one attempt, by the process of "stopping short," to produce a decorative work. Perhaps he will realise, after inevitable failure, that to reach the success that seemed so easy he must retrace his steps, and travel quite a different path—all the more difficult to him, that he does not know his bearings.

Decorative treatment consists neither in the

violation nor in the disregard of natural forms, but in their selection and adaptation; not in ignorant omission of anything, but in the deliberate rejection of all that is irrelevant. Neither does it consist in the grouping of any number of copies of the same prim sprig of foliage round a central point, like so many spokes of a floral wheel. To dissect a plant and arrange its members on a

Medlar tile—the characteristic sepals, &c., essentially ornamental.

geometric basis, is a quite childish idea of ornament. Dissection is useful enough in its way, but it is only a preparatory study.

Characteristically ornamental growth of strawberry.

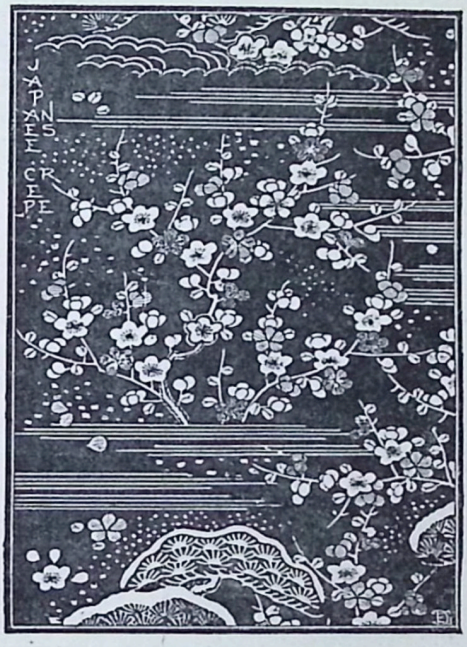
In studying nature the ornamentist will naturally be on the look out for forms which are in themselves suggestive of ornament. And there is in the world such infinite variety, that he who needs must cling always to nature has scarce occasion to let go her skirts.

Not seldom it will be found that the characteristic features of a plant, for example, are at the same time the most ornamental; so that, in adapting it to ornamental design, he may emphasise instead of obliterating its individuality.

So essentially ornamental is the growth of some plants, that a closer study of nature shows how many a decorative detail which we have been in the habit of looking upon as evidence of consummate skill in design, is in reality borrowed from nature.

In the same way, when we come to adapt a study from nature to the purposes of design, we often find that we have, all unconsciously, reproduced some quite familiar form of ornament. Not only is every particular part of plant-growth suggestive of decoration, but each different plant reveals fresh decorative possibilities. Certain plants grow with such crispness and vigour in the curl of their foliage, that they invite the smith to hammer his metal like that! Some are as broad and large in style as if they were already carved in stone; and others, again, grow in such symmetrical and simple lines, that they all but say to the decorator, in so many words, "Come, copy us!"

With regard to the question as to how far one may go with safety in the direction of imitative ornament, the Japanese, if they have not actually solved it, have shown us, at all events, the futility



Japanese rendering of almond blossom, &c.

of confining ourselves within the narrow range of predetermined convention. The limit of natural treatment in design is not marked by a hard line separating ornament from all that is pictorial in art: there is no fixed boundary anywhere, only, as

it were, a high-water mark, beyond which the tide of nature seldom dares to rise.

There are cases in which imitation may be carried as far as you please, so long as it neither obtrudes itself nor brings into obtrusive prominence the object ornamented. The thing to be decorated must always be in the artist's thoughts. If for a moment he be perverted from his decorative purpose by delight in the power of copying nature, the probability is that his work will distract attention from the

object it professes to ornament to itself, or perhaps draw to it more notice than is becoming. The nearer the ornamentist ventures to nature, the greater his danger of falling into the vulgarity of making his art obtrusive. One must be sparing of imitative ornament, the more sparing the closer the imitation comes to nature.

Whenever a detail is to be repeated it is essential that the natural element in it should be toned down and made subsidiary to ornament. If this be a kind of treason against nature, it is a treason of which we are all guilty when we cook our food before eating it. The degree of cooking which may be desirable necessarily varies with the circumstances; but it may safely be said that the more frequently a pattern is repeated, the more important it is that it should be thoroughly "well done." The best carpets, for instance, are the Persian, Indian, and Turkey—and all the nature has been pretty well cooked out of their design.

Good ornament is modest. It is that kind of design which most prides itself upon being natural, which is most apt to "o'erstep the modesty of nature." One would have fancied that the necessity for some adaptation of natural forms to ornamental purposes needed no pointing out to the average intelligence. But there seems something almost like a wilful misunderstanding of the question. Objection is continually made to this or that in ornament that it is not so in nature. Natural

forms every one can understand; but whatever is not recognisable as bird, beast, fish, or flower, appears to some persons absurd. That you should not care to see the lifelike representation of a tiger on your hearthrug, they will admit, perhaps, to be reasonable; but a lap dog! what could be more appropriate? They will not understand that it is not merely the representation of things which would themselves be out of place that is objectionable; but that it is the imitation that is out of place, no matter what it is that is imitated.

Now, the objection to the flowers that oversprawl the lodging-house carpet is that they obtrude themselves upon us, that they show so little purpose or intelligence on the part of the designer, and that they travesty coarsely and clumsily all the subtleties of form and colour that are in nature. Even though they embodied the beauty of nature, they would still suggest a surface by no means pleasant to walk upon. They belie, in short, the purpose to which they are put, deny the subordinate position they occupy, and walk, so to speak, right out of the picture.

The notion of a china flower vase in imitation of wicker work is scarcely less trivial than that of a dessert-dish representing vine-leaves modelled in majolica. The fact that the basket would not hold water, and that the natural vine leaves might serve very well for an impromptu dish, does not alter the case. It is necessary to distinguish clearly

what is amiss in these imitative tricks, and why it is amiss. The examples mentioned above are doubly in fault. In the first place, it is but a poverty-stricken idea to make a vase after the model of a basket, or to fashion a dish in the likeness of a leaf. In the second, it is an unworkmanlike proceeding to manipulate clay as if it were osiers, or to neglect the beautiful and altogether appropriate forms natural to the lathe and the potter's wheel, in favour of the less convenient shape of any natural leaf. For it is an inflexible law of design that in every work of decorative art the artist should be influenced by two primary considerations, namely, by the purpose of the thing to be decorated, and by the characteristic qualities of the material in which he is working. To design, as in the two instances supposed, without regard to either consideration, is to confess one's incapacity, and to confess it twice over.

The least reference to the laws of nature would suggest a very different procedure. Every tree that grows adapts itself to its place, or dies in the attempt. When the circumstances of an individual plant are changed, nature modifies that plant to suit its altered state. If, for example, a flower that is naturally short in the stalk, with its leaves clustered closely round it, chance to grow in a dry ditch, it will shoot up so quickly, in haste to get its share of the sunlight, that it will leave long lengths of stalk between the leaves, quite contrary to its

Oak adapted to form a border.

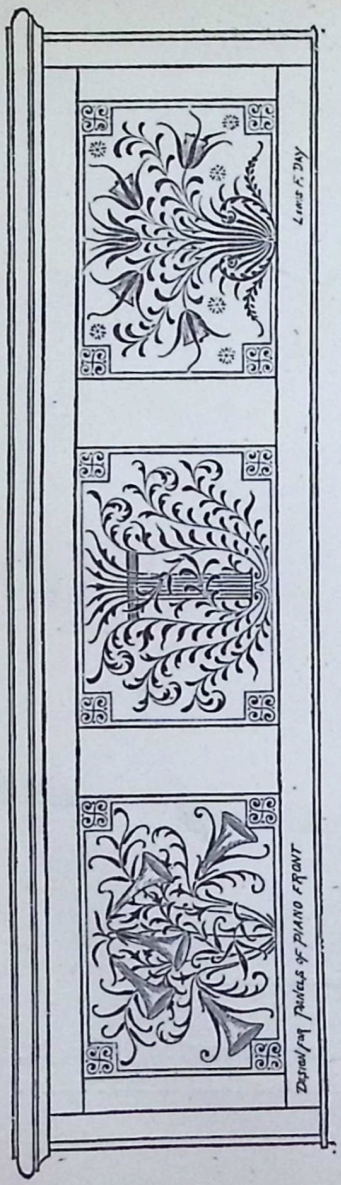
habitual growth. Ivy leaves, again, grow in spiral order round the stem, but against a wall they appear alternately on each side of the stalk; and the rooty fibres by which it attaches itself, do not occur on the loose, berry-bearing branches, which hold their own among the trees.

Nature brings forth herbs and flowers answering to all manner of human needs; but her scope does not include the art of domestic decoration. Had she produced a species of plants whose province in the world was to serve as models for painter, carver, or weaver, she would doubtless have modified her accustomed forms and colours to meet this novel purpose. Since she has neglected to do this, it devolves, obviously, upon us to adapt whatever we may take from nature to the purpose of our art.

Not even the painter can afford to transcribe too literally from nature. There is always the danger that in a painting

Adapted beyond recognition.

the colours of nature will be too startlingly bright, even though they be less intense than in the reality.



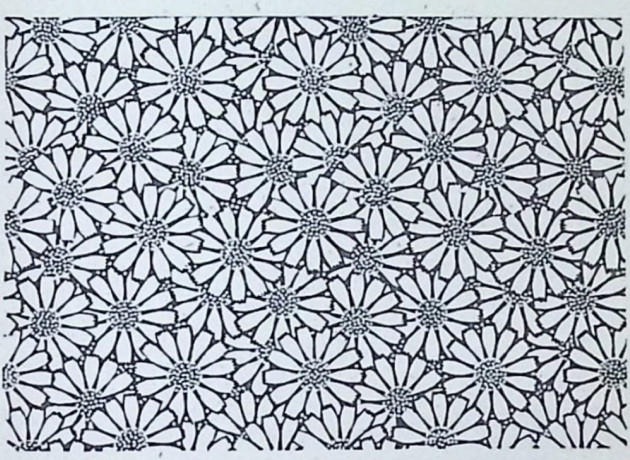
But grass in spring is never too green for us; soft cloud-shadows creep over it continually, and its most vivid colour is only revealed in momentary gleams of light too bright to last. "Why is it that you have made me so perishable?" asked Beauty of Jupiter, and the god answered: "Nay, but it is only the Perishable that I have endowed with beauty!" Certainly the most beautiful effects are those which are most fleeting. To fix them before us in naked isolation, is to rob them of their loveliness. They decline to be transplanted bodily. It takes a poet to translate them.

"True to nature" is the catch phrase of a party; the allegiance of the artist is to art. In ornament we have rather

to consider the nature of the work to be done, than the nature of any object from which we may gather an idea. If our intention be purely decorative, the mere fact that nature has suggested a certain form, need not trammel us in the use of it. We are perfectly at liberty to depart from the suggestive type if we see fit, or even to engraft upon it a character derived from quite another source, so long as we can persuade all into harmony, and produce consistent and satisfactory ornament. Where, however, some natural type has been selected for the sake of symbolism or suggestion, one is less at liberty to alter any of its characteristics. Certainly nothing should be added arbitrarily to it. What is omitted may be regarded as a sacrifice to the necessities of material, position, or purpose. For example, if in a decorative panel we wished to symbolise Morning, we should not be justified in disregarding any of the characteristics of the "Day's-eye," we might choose for that purpose. It would be desirable to consider the growth as well as the form of the flower, and, indeed, due modification would consist in little more than in fitting it to the space it occupied, and in treating it according to the nature of wood-carving, modelling, painting, or whatever process we might adopt for its execution. In adapting the same plant to surface decoration, as in a textile fabric or wall paper, the necessity for repetition, and for a somewhat uniform distribution of design, would

STUDY OF MARGUERITE DAISY ADAPTED TO SURFACE DECORATION

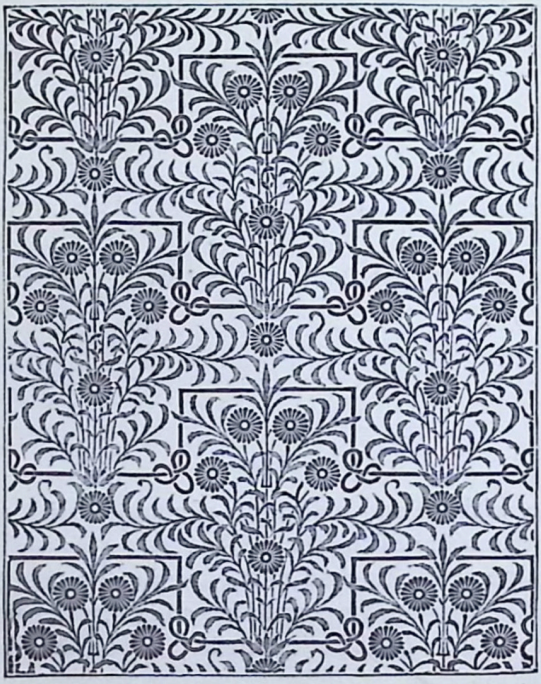
necessitate less strict adherence to natural growth; and the consideration of the secondary nature of all mere surface decoration would suggest a flatter treatment. One might content oneself with the flowers



Daisy diaper.

alone, without any indication of growth. If it were only the *shape* of the flower that led to its use, and no value were attached to its meaning, it might be modified out of all recognition; and every departure from nature would be justified by the production of beautiful ornament. (See daisy-like ornament overleaf.) There is a wide difference between ornament suggested by a natural type, and natural form used for its own sake, but reduced to harmony with some ornamental scheme or purpose.

The fittest representation of any plant in ornament will be attained by comparing the thing itself in nature with its various representations in the art of the past, having always special reference to



Daisy-like floral ornament.

the immediate purpose in hand. Compare the rose in your garden with the Tudor version of it

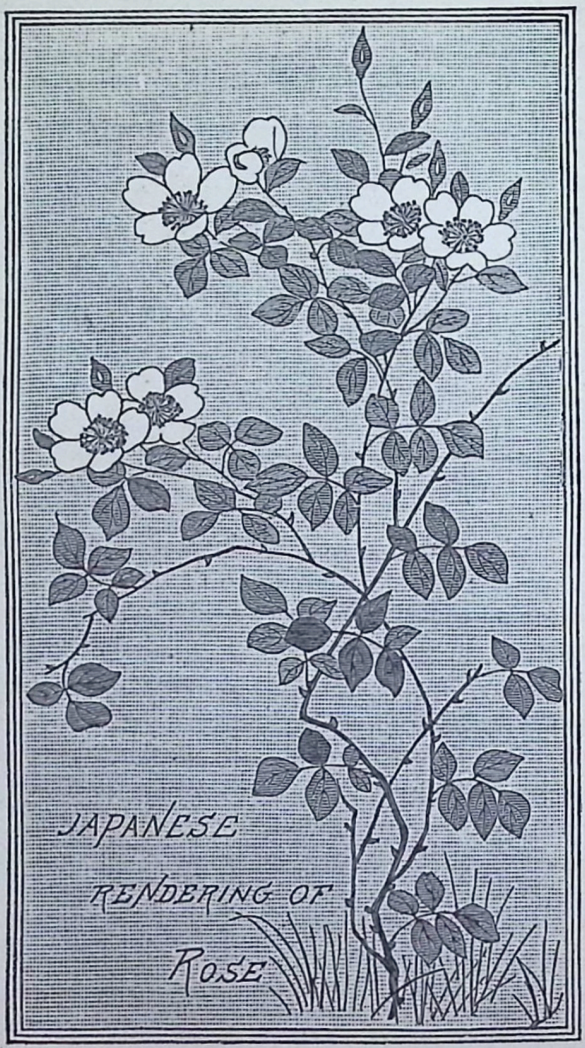
opposite, and with the Japanese and Persian renderings overleaf.

The keynote of a design may be struck by some-

Tudor rose.

thing in the flower itself, or by something in any one of its past representations, or by the material and tools in use: but the one thing of importance is that all should be in tune.

Nowhere is the discrepancy between idea and execution more obvious than in the heraldry of the nineteenth century. Heraldic art is apt to look in these days rather puny. It is, to all intents and purposes, more dead than alive. The "sign of the red lion" will not bear comparison with "a lion gules" of four or five hundred years ago. No mediæval herald was ever guilty of the absurdity of representing a zoological beast dyed red. He concerned himself little about the anatomy of a


JAPANESE
RENDERING OF
ROSE

natural lion ; he just meant to symbolise the bravery, the lion-like nature, as he conceived it, of some fierce combatant ; and he managed to combine symbolism with ornament. The forms he drew were sufficiently intelligible for their purpose — more so perhaps than if they had been more literal : there would be no fear of mistaking his device in the field. Such heraldry as this was heraldic, thorough-bred. It remained for a more cultivated age than his to generate a mongrel something between heraldry and the illustrations in a natural history book, not, perhaps, altogether unworthy to figure on the coach panels of those whose pedigree dates from the Herald's Office. "But," says the Philistine, "if you want a lion paint a lion, and not a nondescript creature that might with quite as much propriety be called a

Persian rendering of the rose.

Heraldic dragon.

leopard or a cat!" Yes, if that is what you want! But heraldry has to do with symbols, not pictures. Then paint the symbol. A zoological lion is as much out of place on a shield of arms as an heraldic beast would be in the wilds of Africa.

It is in a little art like this of heraldry that the reasonableness of apt expression is most obvious; but ill-adapted ornament is always unreasonable. In all art that has any claim to be decorative the natural must needs be translated into the lan-

guage of that art. Decorative presentment is only the vernacular. Though our art be but the expression of nature, it is a "conscious utterance," something more than a parrot cry. The artist's

Heraldic lion.

whole strength is in his loyalty to nature; not in mere verbal fidelity, but in truth—truth to himself, and to his own highest aims. To the expression of this deeper truthfulness various names have been given. The artist is content to call it art.

THE USE IN ORNAMENT.

"Surely use alone
Makes money not a contemptible stone."

THE arts may be likened to so many languages, more or less akin but never identical, and all of them differing from the utterance of nature. Each of these languages may be said to embrace a variety of dialects; and each of the various crafts which go to make decorative art, expresses itself most readily each in the dialect peculiar to it. If the same idea be expressed in several arts, in each case the form of expression will be different; and if an artist borrow a notion from some neighbouring craft, he will translate it (as he would if he had borrowed it from nature) into his own tongue. Art, inasmuch as it implies something more than literal transcript, depends upon expression. All that is

asked of the decorative artist is, that he also shall express himself idiomatically.

This idiomatic expression in ornament has been called conventionality. But the term "conven-

Adaptation of the oak to ornament.

tional" is not altogether a happy one. For one thing it is associated in our minds with what is commonplace and insincere; and it is not desirable that the art of ornament should be bracketed in

Conventional not traditional.

men's minds with the pretence that keeps society going. Then again, the word, even as applied to ornament, serves to express that which is traditional; and, if we trace it back to its root, it does mean literally that which has been agreed upon by mutual consent. It happens that a large proportion of ornament in any degree idiomatic is at the same time traditional, and more or less stereotyped in character; and, as a consequence, the idea of fixedness or familiarity has come to be popularly associated with the word conventional. Yet it is quite possible to have apt expression in ornament not in the least according to tradition.

In the very earliest instances of ornament, obedience to the law of use was a matter of course. If a savage carved the handle of his tomahawk, the carving was just sufficient to give him a tighter grip on the weapon ; he would take very good care not to cut so deep as to weaken it. There was no danger of his indulging in ornament which at a critical moment might cost him his life. And to this day we find that among ourselves the only objects *never* overlaid with misplaced ornamentation are weapons, tools, and things of actual use, where we cannot afford to play the fool and sacrifice consistency to fashion or effect.

It is strange that the preference for fit ornament which comes so naturally to savages, is among Europeans of the present day a sure sign of culture in art.

Between the simplicity of form suggested by utility, and the degree of elaboration which begins seriously to interfere with the first purpose of a thing, there is a very wide range of ornament. No one, it is to be presumed, will deny that all ornament which does so interfere oversteps its limit. It is in hitting the exact mean between bald simplicity and undue enrichment that the difficulty of decoration consists ; and there are obvious reasons why the art of knowing where to stop is rarer among us to-day than it was among the artists of Classic, Mediæval, and Renaissance times, rarer than it is even now among contemporary nations of the East.

We live in an ambitious, or rather a pretentious, age. The accessory arts are all hot to start in business on their own account. What wonder that they come to grief?

The consideration of use, wherever it occurs in decoration, over-rules all others. The tyranny of the main purpose is absolute. Every breach of the simple law of common sense condemns itself. There is no excuse for the house that is picturesque at the expense of convenience, or the room that is made beautiful at the cost of homeliness. Nor art nor reason justify tables that are unsteady on their legs, chairs that are not comfortable to sit on, fenders that afford neither protection from the fire nor a resting-place for the feet, fancy cupboards that take up space out of all proportion to their capacity, furniture so fine that it needs to be coddled. We could dispense with teapots designed to look lovely and to dribble, flower-vases so graceful as to the neck that there is no room for the stalks of the flowers, curious inkstands that seem to hold no ink yet contrive at every dip to leave some on the pen-holder, book-bindings doomed to be soiled by the touch of the first warm hand, pillows harsh with rich embroidery, and quaint handles it hurts you to hold. There is no graver fault of which ornament can be convicted than that of interfering with the use of the object ornamented; no merit of execution can condone that offence.

The most successful enrichment is frequently

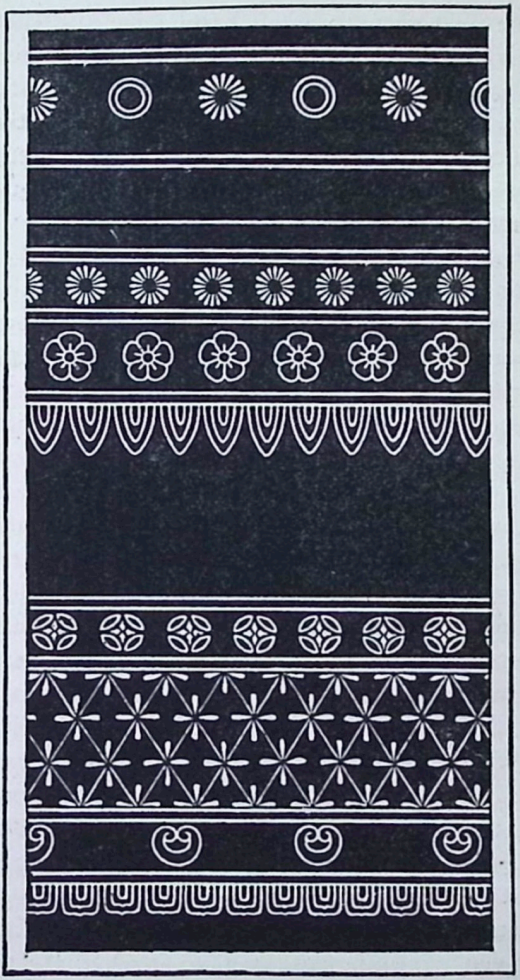
suggested by some useful purpose, and so falls into its place as a matter of course. Ornament has uses, too, quite independent of art. It is not only that plain surfaces are tiresomely monotonous; they are often very inconvenient as well. The slightest soil or scratch, sooner or later inevitable, betrays itself at once upon an even ground; and it is only taking Time by his proverbial forelock, to dapple such spaces with a pattern or to scratch them with ornament, to figure the delicate silk, to carve the surface of the wood.

That ornament should be beautiful is understood; it is no less essential that it should be apt. This is no fantastic theory or arbitrary dogma. It is the plain teaching of nature, of old work, and of common sense. Nature works in no simply utilitarian spirit. Most things natural are also beautiful; and the beauty is perhaps as much another use as the usefulness is, in a sense, a fresh source of beauty. The practical purpose of nature's ornament may not always be apparent to us; but we never find in nature ornament that is contrary to use. The harvest may not be in direct relation to the golden glow of the cornfield, nor the vintage quite according to the mottled crimson of the vine leaves; but the bread is not the less sustaining nor the wine the less refreshing, because of the beauty of field or vineyard. In many instances we find on investigation that beauty is subservient to some useful purpose; as in the case of flowers and berries

which by the brightness of their colour attract the bees and birds. It is only "Nature's journeyman" who is proud of a progeny of monstrous flowers that bear no fruit, and of which not one is to be compared, for beauty, with the simple almond blossom or the wild briar-rose.

One of the first functions of ornament is to compensate, correct, or qualify the simplicity or ungainliness of form dictated by necessity. It is a common mistake to suppose that this is to be done by overlaying it with enrichment, and hiding it under a heap of ornament. The simplest and most obvious lines on which to build a house, the inevitable construction of a machine, the comfortable proportions of a piece of furniture, the convenient form of a gas-pipe—each and all of these may be far from beautiful; but that is scarcely an argument why they should be smothered with scrollery. If the fit and proper form be indeed beyond redemption, there are two courses open to us—either to do without it, or to put up with it as it is.

Happily it is not often so hopeless as that. In most cases a little consideration will show that some of the objectionable features may be omitted or supplanted by others more presentable, and that if the actual lines of an object cannot be made in themselves harmonious, their awkwardness may be to some extent relieved by decorative features which in no way interfere with its use or character. It is not quantity of ornament that tells, but ornament



Ornament in cross bands

in the right place ; a cross band here and there to break any disproportionate length, a few parallel stripes to counteract the appearance of thickness, an occasional rosette or flower to withdraw attention from the less interesting parts of the construction—simple devices like these are often quite enough to redeem a thing from ugliness.

The defect of the thing to be ornamented is the starting point of the decorator. If it be already perfect, why, that is enough. It is because the proportion of a room is defective that we desire to give the appearance of greater height or length to it ; because it is bare that we seek to enrich it ; because it is dull that we wish to enliven it ; because it is glaring that we do our best to subdue it ; because it is cold that we want to give it warmth ; because in short it is unsatisfactory that we propose to do anything at all to the room.

The motives which prompt the undertaking of decoration should also by rights suggest the nature and extent of the ornament. We could do very well, for example, with perfectly plain cardbacks but for the fact that every speck on the enamel would tell tales. It is convenient, therefore, to cover the back of a card pretty evenly with ornament ; and a design which did not cover the ground would fail of its purpose.

Ornament may be in itself perfectly satisfactory and even charming, and yet so inadequate to the purpose to which it is put that it is obviously out of

place. It is scarcely necessary to say that however beautiful such work may be, it is bad decoration. Whenever the conditions of ornament are

Card-back design.

impossible of fulfilment, it is better left alone; and the conditions proper to ornament are, that it should be fit—for its purpose, for its place, and for the material in which, and the process by which, it is executed.

Intelligent decoration has always some definite intention in it; and that intention or idea rules everything absolutely, even to the least significant detail. Whether the motive be unpretending or ambitious, every stroke of work properly leads up to it. Every stroke that does not do so is ill done. The first step in design is to determine which shall be the culminating point of the decoration; and however lavishly the artist may distribute enrichment, he reserves for it his crowning effort, making all else converge towards it. Without such emphasis of treatment ornament sinks into monotony. The point or points of emphasis being determined, all else is subordinate, background, to be decorated, if at all, with ornament apt to a position comparatively unpretending and subdued.

The term "background," however, is itself only relative. Both walls and floors, for example, are unmistakably backgrounds, from a decorative point of view; yet the enrichment befitting the one would be offensive in the other.

It is not difficult to keep a background in its place, if you are content with simple monochrome, or with minute pattern-work in tints which, however bright, lose themselves at some little distance in a haze of soft colour, and only reveal the design that may be there when you come closer and look for it. The difficulty is in inventing a pattern that shall not be insignificant, nor yet beckon your attention. The

unpardonable sin in ornament, is the attempt to usurp the first place. It should simply fit its purpose, neither more nor less. It is equally at fault when it is too rich or too poor for its place.

Background pattern.

We see frequently, set in excellent cabinet work, panels of so trivial a character as to cast suspicion

over the whole work, and make it hard to believe that the workmanship has been conscientious and careful up to that point, and has failed only just where it should have culminated. Economy is pleaded in excuse for this paltriness. True economy would suggest rather that tawdry ornament should be left out.

The opposite fault of degrading good work to a position unworthy of it is less common. Yet we do find flower and figure panels as background to shelves for objects with which they cannot but compete. This is no more to be condoned than uninteresting diaper or coarse ornament usurping a place of honour in a framework of delicate mouldings.

Certain objects, such as things purely ornamental, and certain portions of objects, such as the doors and panels of furniture and the like, deserve prominence ; and in these posts of distinction the artist is justified in a freedom of treatment not warranted elsewhere.

The panel occupies a position that may be either insignificant, or of the very highest importance. In the latter case there is little restraint as to the extent to which elaboration and realisation may be carried. The law of fitness decrees that it shall always remain a panel—however admirable in itself, still more admirable as part of the whole. The danger with pictorial work is that it may forget its dependent position, and attract too much attention,

either to itself, or to the object which it pretends to honour. But if only the artist bear in mind the condition of fitness or decorative unity, for the rest he is free to perfect his work to his heart's content; and it is neither more nor less than pedantry that would hinder the competent man from doing his utmost.

Clematis panel.

There are many ways in which a decorative painting, artistically on a level with pictures on the walls, may acknowledge that it is part of the wall or cabinet in which it is framed. The evidence that it was designed to occupy the space it fills, its unobtrusive neutrality, or the fact that it forms as it were a high note of the prevailing colour scheme, may suffice to show that it has no desire whatever

to step forward and assert itself at the expense of oneness.

Another question of fitness arises in reference to the position in which a design will be presented to view. It is generally recognised that the pattern of a carpet or any other floor covering should be designed with a view to its effects from all sides—that it should be what is called "all round"; but the Moslem, whose prayer-mat was always placed facing the east, was quite justified in designing it for that one position in which only it was likely to be seen; and we might with equal consistency design a stair-carpet (which is noticed chiefly as we ascend) on the principle of an upward-growing pattern.

With regard to the actual shapes of things there is not often much room for question as to their appropriateness. If the consideration of use has been overlooked in their design, we very soon find out their inconvenience.

However calmly we may tolerate existing inconsistencies, there is in most of us a native preference for what is practical; and the suitability or unsuitability of a form to its purpose is a thing that can be proved.

The fitness of applied ornament is not easily to be defined. Its appreciation depends to some extent upon that very intangible quality called feeling, and to some extent upon knowledge. If a man cannot see the incongruity of incongruous

ornament, it is difficult to explain to him. He lacks perhaps the sense of what is becoming, or the necessary knowledge of the subject.

There are many to whom the most elaborate and most ambitious work will always seem to be the best. Such men will sum up your objection to work that is finished too minutely for its position, or too delicately for its purpose, by asserting that what you find fault with is that it is "too well done." On the contrary, the contention is that the expenditure of labour not justified by the result is *ill* spent. That which is misplaced or ill-timed is done amiss, however thoroughly done. Fitness is essential to well-doing; and what is unfit falls far short of the height at which there should be any danger of overstepping the boundary of well-doing and doing too well. Any discrepancy of workmanship takes away from our enjoyment of it, even where the discrepancy consists in a part of the work being carried to a point of finish inconsistent with its surroundings. In admiration of the absolute excellence of the work itself, we may occasionally be inclined to condone the offence against taste; but, all the same, it is an offence.

Many a time, too, there is a temptation to shrink from the invidious task of fault-finding; and, rather than say outright that ornament is discordant and tasteless, one is inclined to wrap up the truth in soft words, and say that it is "too well done."

In one sense only can any part of a work be done

too well, namely, as implying that all else is not done well enough—the fault of discrepancy, that is to say, may lie in the surrounding work.

Art can in truth no more be too well done than it can be too beautiful. To do unwisely is not to do too well—Shakespeare notwithstanding. Othello did not love too well, but too blindly, too blunderingly, and altogether too stupidly, after the manner of his brutal kind. Much good work is suffocated with false finish, the perpetrator possibly justifying the deed to his conscience by the thought that he loves his art too well to exercise restraint upon himself. A far more certain sign of devotion to his craft would be in the readiness to sacrifice to it something of his not unpardonable pride of execution.

THE WORKMAN AND HIS TOOLS.

"If you do not use the tools they use you."

NOTHING is more striking to a student of old work than the *traditional* character of the best ornament. So much is this so that there is more than a possibility of forms intrinsically beautiful becoming at last wearisome to us from perpetual repetition. We have even to remind ourselves that, however appropriate certain traditional forms may be to the purpose to which they were put, that appropriateness has only this much to do with tradition, that it was owing to their fitness that they were preserved; and that in passing down from hand to hand, whatever of inappropriateness there may have been in them has been worn away. They are often, in effect, perfect, so perfect sometimes as to have lost something of their interest. Traditional forms and even

traditional methods, however, do not exhaust the possible in ornament; they are only the prelude to what may yet be done in the way of decorative treatment.

The gulf which commercial economy has found it convenient to dig between the arts and crafts has to be bridged by the ornamentist, though he pretend to be no Colossus. The prospects of art are brightest when the artificer is himself the designer and the vendor of his wares; for he cannot fail to have some respect for the traditions which exist in all trades, embodying as they do the accumulated knowledge of all time. The best tools and the best ways of using them may not yet all have been discovered; but we may be pretty sure that in current modes of workmanship will be found the key to simpler and more perfect processes. A good workman hits upon a new manner, and good workmen following him improve upon his discovery; and so the traditional ways of working represent the sum of technical experience.

Unhappily, intelligent and earnest workmen do not largely preponderate in any art or trade. Adam Bedes are as exceptional as they are worthy. The lazy find out cheap and easy ways of shirking honest work, and succeeding lazy ones carry these tricks to the furthest possible point. One favourite expedient of laziness is never to go out of the beaten track, never to do anything new, which exacts thought, but to reproduce the same old

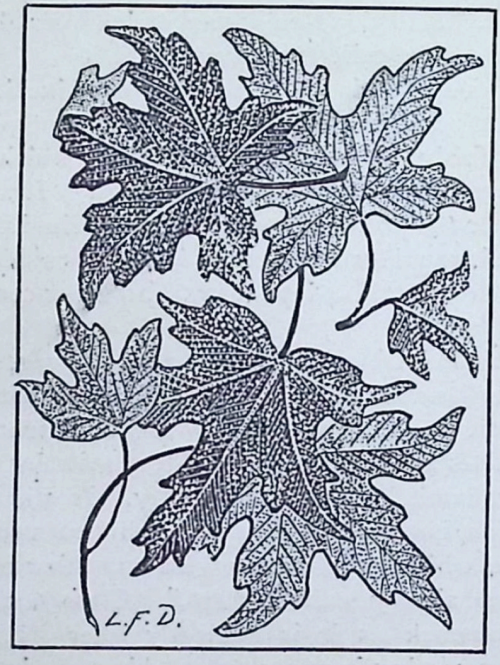
well-worn pattern, till a man can do it almost with his eyes shut, certainly without consciously bringing his brains into play. His handiwork has consequently about as much feeling in it as if it had been cast in a machine. It has been cast in a machine. And this stereotyped and lifeless detail has come to be called "conventional!"

The vice of laziness, however, is only incidental and not peculiar to craftsmanship. "Scamping" cannot fairly be identified with "that which has been agreed upon by mutual consent." It would be nearer the truth to say, that not until all possibility of growth has ceased in it is it possible for an art to crystallise into forms altogether conventional.

That kind of conventionality which comes of knowing how to use one's tools with effect, controls to some extent the character of all good ornament, but it does not impose the slightest restraint upon variety, invention, or individuality. It will save confusion, however, to describe such treatment by a name which does not suggest any other meaning and simply call it "apt." Clearly, art is apt inasmuch as it is distinctly after its kind, painting, carving, hammering, stitching, or whatever it may be.

A workman fairly proficient in any of the applied arts, and in the habit of thinking over what he is about, *must* produce work that is apt. If he be a man of any individuality his work will be

characteristic of him also, but it will be none the less apt because he has put himself into his work. The least consideration will convince him that, having undertaken to ornament a thing, whatever



Adapted to simple inlay.

else he may do, he is bound to make it ornamental. One cannot properly begin to design ornament until one has some knowledge of what it is to be applied to; and it is the test of all good ornament

that is applied judiciously, that it does not in the slightest degree interfere with the use of the object decorated, and that it is strictly adapted to the nature of the material in which it is carried out. Misapply the most exquisite workmanship, and it is

Adapted to appliqué embroidery.

worse than wasted ; add enrichment that unfits an object for its prime purpose, and it becomes offensive ; work in antagonism to the material employed, and you produce, *perhaps*, at great pains, an effect far inferior to what you might have gained with ease by an intelligent use of the means at hand.

The considerations of material, process of manu-

facture, and method of execution, are of too technical a nature to be discussed here at any great length. But it is necessary that even the amateur should know something of the value of workmanlikeness in ornament; and he has only to know it in order to appreciate the unreasonableness of neglecting it. It may require some little training and study, some degree of familiarity with the various crafts, to detect at once whether a design is adapted to be wrought or cast, printed or woven, carved or modelled; whether it is fit to be executed in stone or plaster, silk or paper, wood or metal. But it will take only a

Adapted to painting.

moment's thought to convince the least artistic, that the processes of hammering and casting, weaving and printing, modelling and carving, are so different; and the nature of hard stone and soft plaster, cross-grained wood and malleable iron, the printer's block and the weaver's cards, are so different, that they call each for different treatment. And more than this, whoever inquires a little more closely into the matter will see that each particular material, and each particular process by which it is manipulated, even each particular tool employed in its manipulation, has its own particular limitations as well as its facilities. The surest way to success is to bear these in mind, to keep well within the limits prescribed by the circumstances, and to make the most of the advantages peculiar to them.

It is only too possible to work in opposition to natural conditions. But this is at best boasting. Exhibition work is, for example, most of it brag, the exhibitor being aware that delicate and reticent art would stand no chance of recognition in the bustle of an international bazaar. In every-day design such boasting is fatal; it leads straight away from that modest workmanship which is the ideal of craftsmanship. In the first place it is very doubtful whether the conditions will be overcome by the ambitious craftsman—his presumption is very likely to be in excess of his power—and in the second, supposing the result to be satisfactory, it will have been reached by an expenditure of time,

energy, and material, which, wisely directed, would have gone very much further. It is difficult to speak in moderate terms of such blundering wrong-headedness.

Just as the general character of ornament is properly suggested by its position and purpose, so also must material and method of production deter-

Domestic stained glass.

mine to some extent its detail. There is no reason why wood-work should protest that it is joinery, why stained glass should proclaim that it is glazing, or a wall paper shout at you that it is printed. The simple reasonableness of the matter is that each should be, and be content with

being, what it naturally is; and for the plain reason that disobedience to inevitable conditions is, so to speak, resented by them, and leads to labour lost; while to those who work in sympathy with them they unfold resources the artist had not dreamt of, yielding to gentle persuasion what was not by any means to be forced from them.

Design adapted to simple glazing.

When workmanlike treatment leads to such direct results, the wastefulness of ignoring it is, artistically speaking, criminal. It may not appear to others than artists a matter of much moment whether a material be treated after its kind or contrary to it, but all will admit that it is worth

thinking about whether the cost of decoration be increased or diminished; and it may be worth while to remind them that nothing is more costly than unpractical work, whereas apt treatment minimises expense. Those who begin by encouraging judicious workmanship for merely practical reasons will soon learn to appreciate it for its individuality. It was not until all character had been smoothed out of it by unthinking mechanism that folk became apathetic about every-day art. No wonder that such lifeless stuff ceased to interest any one.

The aptness of ornament to material, tools, and mode of workmanship is a virtue best appreciated by the workman. Yet, in the eagerness to show his skill, he is often led to do just the kind of thing he should not do, if only to show that he can do it. Nor is he in this respect restrained by the taste of the purchaser, who is ordinarily far from realising any necessity for workmanlike treatment. And as a fact we find that any illogical *tour de force* is more generally admired than the most masterly grasp of resource. You have only to put into marble a subject that is worthy of nothing more enduring than a page in *Punch*, and it will attract greater attention than a masterpiece of Greek art. Possibly some enterprising manufacturer will purchase it—for a trade-mark!

It is hardly necessary to discriminate particularly between the special aptitude of design to material, to tools, and to method; the three are so closely

connected that the one implies the others. They are all interdependent one upon the other; and the three together determine, or should determine, the character of ornamental detail.

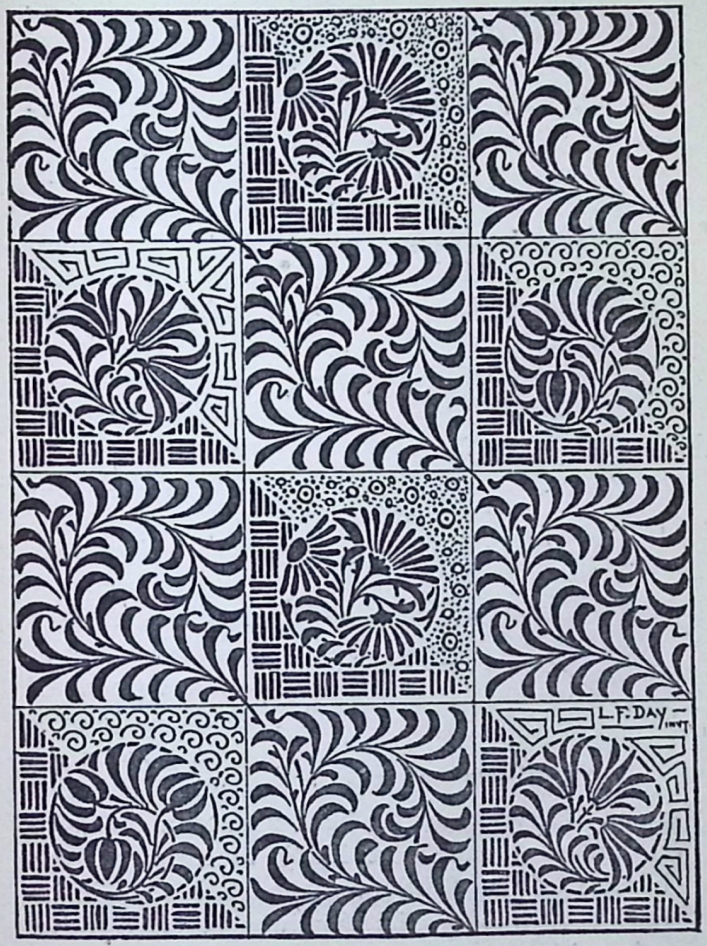
In the most successful examples of ancient ornament, of whatever time or country, we find this same aptness to be characteristic; and the main use of studying old work is, that we thereby learn how others before us adapted design to its conditions and purpose.

When we come to look at the way in which the craftsmen of past times worked in sympathy with their materials and means, we become aware that the limits imposed by decorative necessity are not mere hindrances: they act as safeguards too, compelling us, almost whether we will or no, to refinement, breadth, repose. Who can say how much of the superiority of old stained glass to Limoges enamel is due to the absolute necessity of glazing and the consequent breadth of style? If the Greeks had been familiar with all the secrets of ceramic glazes we might have had Greek vases as unsatisfactory in colour as the ware of Della Robbia or Palissy! Even the unwelcome restrictions of economy and commerce have their value. The necessary repeat of one unit in a design, as in stencilling, block-printing, stamping, weaving, and the like, tends towards simplicity; and the value of such repetition is attested by the fact that it has come to be commonly adopted for the sake of its

effect, where there is no strict use in it: it is enough that it gives scale to the design.

From the beginning the apt use of a particular material has continually served, not only as a wholesome restraining influence, but actually as suggestion of most beautiful ornament. Something at least of Egyptian dignity is due to the employment of granite; something of Greek refinement to the marble used in architecture; while the peculiar character of Swiss or Scandinavian wood-work is, perhaps, more obviously carpentry than it is distinctly Scandinavian or Swiss. In the more strictly decorative arts, how much of the beauty of *cloisonné* or *champlevé* enamel depends upon the network of gold lines that frames-in each separate colour! yet the gold outline is as much a condition of manufacture as are the leads in stained glass. Think of the infinite variety of beautiful geometric pattern-work that has resulted from the need of simple forms in mosaic-work and inlay; and the graceful and vigorous metal-work that has grown out of the readiness with which a bar of iron can be hammered into shape.

It would seem almost as if every success in decorative art depended to some extent upon restricting circumstances, and every process of manufacture were suggestive of some specific beauty in design. The process of incising suggests its own simplicity; niello or damascening invites the delicate intricacy of detail that we find in Persian



Pattern repeated on formal lines.

and Indian work; the style of the beautiful book-bindings of the sixteenth century results almost entirely from the method of "tooling"; the best forms of early pottery were mainly due to the process of "throwing," and the shape of the potter's hand had more to do with fashioning them than his brains; much of what we most value in Venetian glass is inseparable from the use of the blow-pipe.

The characteristic of nearly all early ornament is its directness. The obvious ease with which it was done gives it no little of its charm. We take delight in work that was so evidently a delight to the workman, and enjoy his "happy thought" almost as if it had been our own. Apt treatment of ornament is only another name for intelligent treatment. He who runs his head against a difficulty is not the man most likely to carry off the honours of the fight, even though his skull be thick enough to force its way through. Decorative exigencies are not to be ignored, nor yet to be bullied. The wisest plan is frankly to accept the

Example of *direct* brush-work.

Design adapted to inlay.

conditions, pay toll to consistency, and so, instead of making enemies of the means at hand, win them to your side. It is they who will help us eventually to the most sure success. And though sheer force may sometimes prevail over everything, it is safer by far to depend upon one's brains. A clear-sighted craftsman takes in the situation at once, and resolves what is best to be done. The decorator is not yet master of the situation when he is acquainted with the use of the thing to be decorated, its position and purpose. He must appreciate the nature of his material, in all its strength and all its weakness; he must be master of his tools, knowing well what they can do, what they can best do, and what they cannot hope to do at all; he must be at home in every process to be employed.

What a catalogue the common sins against consistency in ornament would make! China is painted with realistic pictures that have not, and in the nature of things cannot have, the colours true to nature, whilst all the beautiful effects proper to ceramic painting (semi-accidental but wholly decorative) remain unsought. We see stucco bursting in the attempt to look like stone, when it might have been so easily enriched by scratching or incising. Marble is worried out of all the dignity of sculpture. Painting rivals the mechanical exactness of manufacture, lacking all the charm of hand-work. This chapter would not hold the illustra-

tions that occur every day of the way in which we ignorantly or rashly, in any case stupidly, neglect the conspicuous aptitude of a material for characteristically beautiful effects, and stultify ourselves in the attempt to make it do, what in other materials would be easy enough, but what it cannot do.

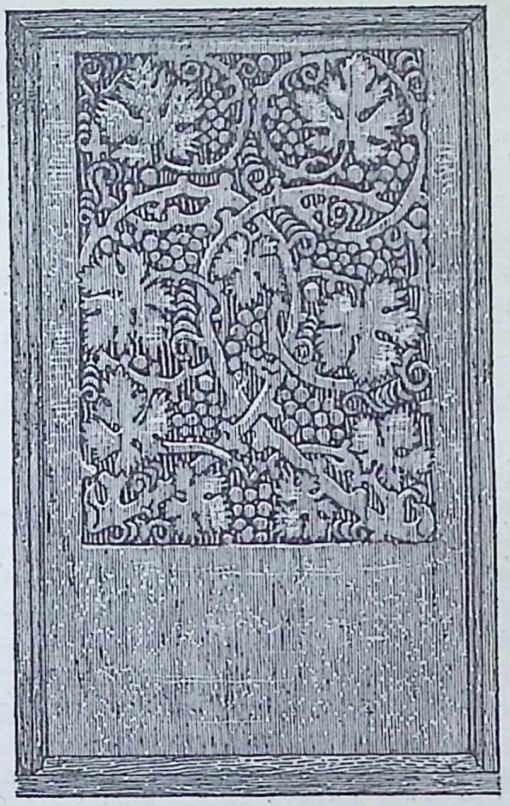
Architecture is to be considered not only as architecture but as stone, brick, timber, iron, concrete, or whatever its construction may be. Lace should not only be lace-like in design, but should leave no doubt as to whether it is "point," "pillow," or "guipure." Joinery and cabinet-work should not only be treated as wood, but as hard or soft wood; and if the design show that it was either suggested by, or modified according to, the character of the particular wood employed, so much the better.

It stands to reason that the tools to be used should influence the design. In simple and straightforward joinery we must be reminded continually of the planks out of which it was framed, of the plane, the chisel, or the gouge used in finishing it. And though this is not necessary in the more elaborate and costly examples of cabinet-work, at least we ought never to be perplexed as to how an effect was arrived at, still less offended by evidence that the workman went out of his way to avoid the apt and natural treatment of his material: by such false pride he proves himself not the more an artist but the less a workman.

The conventional forms common to any of the applied arts are part and parcel of a workmanlike process. If a man who knew absolutely nothing about pottery were set to design a pot upon paper, he would probably imitate to the best of his ability something else; but if the art of "throwing" were first made clear to him, and he were to begin at once to work at the wheel, he would most likely, as soon as he could achieve anything, produce unawares a replica of some rude Saxon, Roman, or Mexican earthenware. To see a potter at his wheel is to realise how the common forms of pottery could not be different from what they are. Again, the painter ignorant of this branch of art might very likely be betrayed by his box of water-colours into something very much in the way of a picture; but if he had the vessel before him, and the few fit materials for pot decoration at hand, he would more probably proceed to stamp or scratch on it patterns such as we find in the very earliest ware, or to paint on it something related (however distantly) to the ornament on Greek vases.

The late Owen Jones put it that "we are rather tempted to believe that the various forms of the leaves of a Greek flower have been generated by the brush of the painter." He need have had no hesitation in asserting it as a fact. The idea of those forms being founded upon the growth of the honeysuckle is as much a fable as the popular legend concerning the origin of the Corinthian capital. That

the resemblance of the forms which grew under his hand to the honeysuckle may eventually have struck



Direct and workmanlike flat carving—Old German.

the painter (as it strikes us) is likely enough; and, having perceived that likeness, he may have empha-

sised it; but in the majority of cases, more especially in work of the archaic period, the resemblance is of the faintest. On the other hand, it is impossible for any one who has worked with a long-haired brush, or "tracer," to come away from the vase room of the British Museum without feeling convinced that the painted ornament is very emphatically brush-work—that is to say produced, and in great measure suggested, by the use of the brush. It is difficult to produce it any other way, easy to draw it freely with the brush. If you proceed to design with a firm and springing "tracer," you will involuntarily produce some such forms as are to be found on the Greek vases. And though, no doubt, this would be due partly to familiarity with the ancient forms, the unconscious exercise of memory, it cannot be memory only; for you will find similar, and sometimes the same forms, in all ornament that has been invented brush in hand. Compare the Greek work with any other ancient ornamental painted pottery, compare it with the detail of Early-English glass-painting, and you will find something more than casual resemblance. The family likeness is unmistakable: the forms are all very certainly sprung from the brush.

Greek brush-work is a typical illustration of apt ornament, and deserves to be considered for a moment. The scheme of ornament once determined, we can imagine the painter proceeding, brush in hand, to put in the patterns, inventing or adapting as he went on. Aiming at no great

originality, content to play variations upon the primitive brush patterns, he just put in the strokes that occurred to him, or that he felt were wanted. He had, no doubt, from the first a general notion

Suggested by Greek brush-work.

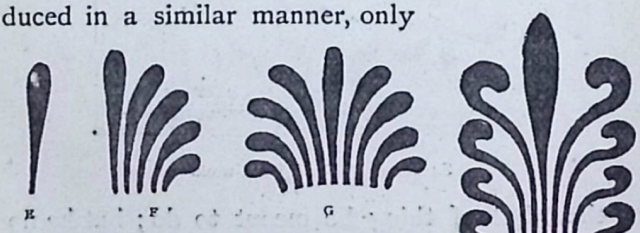
of the kind of thing he meant to do; but he no more knew the exact design he was going to paint than we know beforehand the words our thoughts will take in speaking. His words were so many strokes of the brush.

The spontaneity of this brush-speaking is remarkable. The first natural ejaculation of a long-haired sable brush is the upward stroke A. The delicate gradation in its outline is due entirely to the play of the brush, thickening as the pressure is increased, and tapering off again as the stress is relaxed. If you keep your hand in the same position and proceed to make a succession of these brush flicks (B) they range themselves as a matter of course in the order shown at C, becoming smaller and smaller as they radiate at a less and less distance from the axis of your wrist. Repeat this process on the other side and you have the common form of anthemion, D. The other common form, which has more resemblance to the honeysuckle, is produced in a similar manner, only

A B

C

D



E F G H

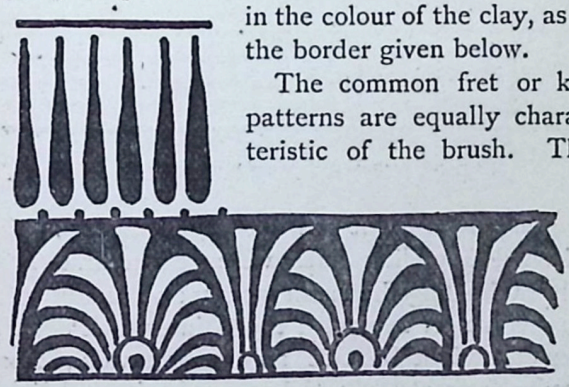
by commencing at the top with a blot or blob of the brush, which must be full of colour, and gently drawing the

brush away to a point below. The examples above show the stroke E, the succession of strokes F, and the complete figure G. A less familiar variety of the ornament is shown in H. Sometimes the strokes were less springing and still less honeysuckle - like, as in J. Similar patterns were almost as easily produced by painting - in the ground, and leaving the pattern

J

in the colour of the clay, as in the border given below.

The common fret or key patterns are equally characteristic of the brush. This



Example of pattern left in the natural colour of the ground.

may seem not so easily credible to those who are unacquainted with the use of the brush, and who

know these patterns only in the printed illustrations of them, where all the character has been eliminated by the lithographer, who has substituted for it a mechanical correctness (?) of his own. If they will refer to the vases in the British Museum, they will see at once that mechanical exactness is the last quality that could be laid to their account. Next to the free brush-flick nothing is so easy to draw with a brush as straight lines of this character. It requires only a blunt brush and a hand firm enough and light enough to maintain always a delicate and even pressure. The difficulty occurs at the angles, and the ancient pot-painters scarcely attempted any great accuracy there. The drawing of a simple

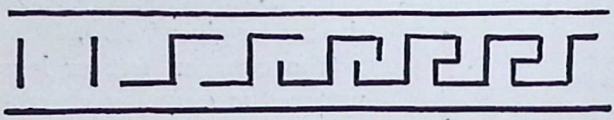


Diagram showing construction of fret pattern.

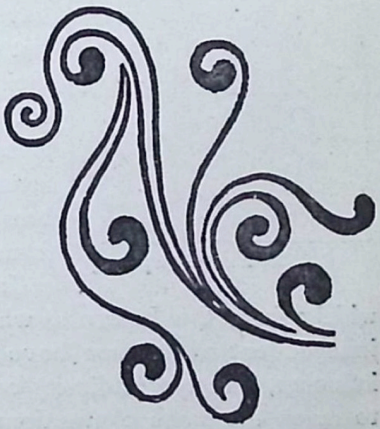
fret was done right off in this manner: the horizontal bounding lines were drawn first (probably by holding the brush steady and making the vase revolve on a pivot); the painter then drew a series of upright lines at regular intervals; from these he drew, at top and bottom, horizontal lines, to right and left respectively; to each of these again, were attached shorter vertical lines, which were finally united by other short horizontal strokes,

and the pattern was complete. The accompanying diagram may make this more clear.

With experience the most intricate frets may be sketched in this manner, the eye learning to measure the distances with almost absolute certainty. The Greeks saved themselves much trouble in this respect by habitually interrupting the long horizontal bands by means of square stops or pateræ, leaving themselves only short lengths to deal with.

The familiar wave scroll may be sketched in two or three different ways. It is as easy to sketch it in *à la grecque* as it is difficult to put it in with the mechanical exactness of modern imitators.

We have instances of Greek ornament which is nothing at all but brush-play. The painter just amused himself by letting the brush go, almost without guidance, and watching the curves that came of it, much as he might have watched the wreaths of smoke curling upwards from his pipe.



Example of brush-play.

The forms first suggested by the

use of the brush happened in the end to suggest natural forms, and so by degrees some imitation of nature became not uncommon. But for the most part, and until a very late period, the Greeks continued to let the brush control the manner of rendering it. Here is a pattern of which you may say with equal truth, that it consists of brush strokes arranged in the order of leaflets or of leaf forms modified by the brush. Certain bud forms also grew out of the brush. Indeed, few if any of the forms eventually borrowed from nature appear to have been selected without due reference to the facility with which they could be rendered. It is self-evident how the artist arrived through brush-work at natural form.

Brush-leaf.

Greek bud-forms.

In this he differed widely from the Japanese, whose art (absolutely independent as it must have been of all Greek influence, direct or indirect) came through nature to much the same conventional conclusion. The character of a great deal of Japanese foliage is

the simple result of attemping to render nature as directly as possible with the brush. Working from nature, brush in hand, the Japanese artist almost unconsciously translated his original into the vernacular of china—into brush-work.

Greek.

It is curious to notice this point at which, contrary to all expectation, Greek art and Japanese for a moment join hands. The Japanese renderings of the chrysanthemum given below are as much like honeysuckle as any anthemion, and might pass for Greek almost. There is some similarity also in the Greek and Japanese ren-

Japanese peony.

Japanese chrysanthemum flowers.

dering of the buds; and there is something again in the Japanese bird overleaf, and in that on page 98, that reminds one of Greek brush-work.

It is significant of the connection between all apt workmanship, that artists of two such distinctly different types, working on such different principles,

and according to such different traditions, should arrive (the one from brush-work to nature, the other from nature to brush-work) at forms of ornament which may be said to overlap one another. The apt form seems to be almost inevitable: good workmen in all times have been agreed upon that

Bird rendered in brush-strokes.

one point. Hence it is that modern progress is mainly in the direction whither the old ways led. Design and workmanship have risen to a higher point, not when materials and tools have been despised, but when apter, and more sympathetic treatment has been adopted, more idiomatic expression found.

THE RIGHTS AND WRONGS OF IMITATION.

"Nothing concealed that is done, but all things done to adornment."

ORE than enough has been said concerning the heresy of shams in decoration, and yet not quite enough. The reasons that have been urged against shams have not always been the most reasonable. Rather too much stress has been laid upon the immorality of pretence, and not enough on its paltriness. Something remains to be said upon the flimsiness of the shift of imitation, upon its futility, upon the lack of feeling and fancy that it implies in the artist who resorts to it.

Have we no invention that we complacently fall back upon the poor device of making one material look as nearly as possible like another?

Judged on its own merits, apart from its insincerity, there is really very little to be said in favour of such expedients as graining or marbling. Once in a way, as a kind of practical joke, the thing might be amusing; but no joke was ever so little able to bear

repetition. From the economical point of view it is contended, and fairly, that the imitation wears better than plain paint or simple paper, and that the varnish on it is a protection ; but plain paint and simple paper are not the only alternatives to pretence, and there is no law against the use of varnish wherever it may be necessary. Besides, there is the obvious alternative of mottling your colour somewhat after the manner of certain Japanese lacquer. This method lends itself to very rich and varied effects of colour, without imitating anything ; it wears quite as well as graining, and is quite as easily "touched up."

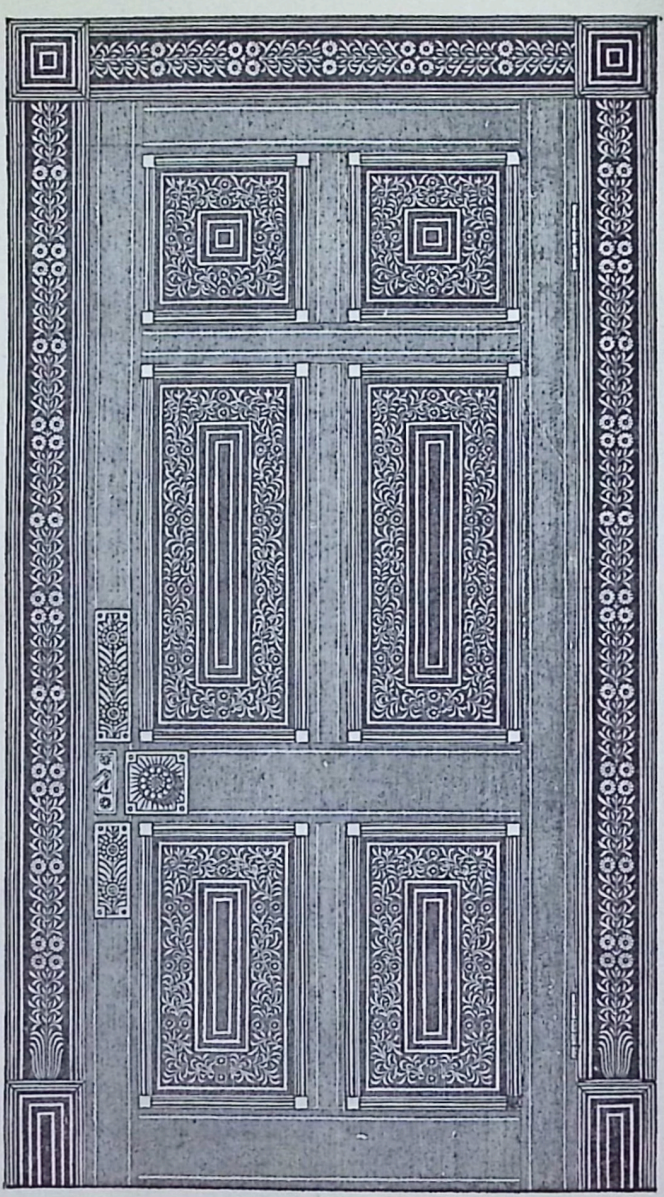
The plea that effect is everything, never mind how you arrive at it so you reach it, is none the less unscrupulous that this unscrupulousness is exercised in the matter of art. That true artists have used it proves, not that it is good, but that they were fallible. The argument that it pays better to supply the demand for graining, than to endeavour to create a demand for something worthier, is only an argument of the pocket, and does not touch the question at issue. Whatever of beauty there may be in sham wainscot or marble, or other such efforts of prevarication (and they are sometimes satisfactory enough as colour), is more than counter-balanced by the pretentiousness of it all.

A curious fact in connection with graining is that really good imitation is almost as expensive as the wood itself would be. But then polished wood-

work would need to be of the best; every crack and every clumsy joint would be exposed to view; whereas painting hides a multitude of sins, and men live in happy ignorance of the yawning gaps in the joinery when they have been stopped with putty and covered over with paint. The most elaborate pattern-work would scarcely be more costly than the best graining.

It is true that many so-called imitations are either so ill done, or so misplaced, that they must in fairness be held guiltless of any serious intention

Elaborately painted door-panel.



Elaborately patterned door.

of misleading. No one is led to suppose that the hall and staircase of the villas in the "Marine Parade" are of Siena marble, or the folding doors of bird's-eye maple; nevertheless the fact that such work invariably imitates something costlier than itself, leaves no room for doubt that it originated in pretence. The first delinquents had evidently got beyond the stage of copying, ape-like, from pure delight in mimicry, and had begun, not only to indulge in costly luxuries, but to put up, in default of them, with the cheap counterfeit of what they could not get.

We have grown so accustomed to certain of these simulations that to some people there seems a sort of homeliness about them, use being second nature. Some simple folk, too, who would be the last to affect palatial splendour, are condemned by circumstances to live in "marble halls." But for those who are their own masters, it would be as well not to bear false witness against themselves, and, if they have no sympathy with cheap splendour, to refrain from following those who have. Why wear the badge of a snobbishness of which you are guiltless? If we adopt the habit of pretenders we have no right to complain that we are mistaken for them: we accuse ourselves.

In proportion to the importance of a building, private or public, is the offence of this simulation. It is worst where we might reasonably expect that the doors would be of hard wood and the columns

of marble. The mock granite looks peculiarly mean on the staircase of the British Museum! Thoroughly to realise all the shabbiness of sham marble, one should see it in process of peeling off the walls of a ducal mansion. The more appropriate the real thing would be, the more offensive becomes its imitation, for the more obvious it is that it was meant to deceive. One can look leniently upon the marble "end-papers," so dear to the book-binder, because they could not be marble, because they are not like marble, and because they are the natural outcome of a workmanlike process of making. Where there is really intent to deceive, neither the transparency of the cheat nor its success will justify it.

It is easier to denounce pretence than to draw with certainty the line at which it begins. Where we have a right to expect the actual thing instead of the counterfeit, we resent the deception. Where the thing counterfeited would itself have been out of place, the inappropriateness of the pretence jars upon us. Marbling and graining, for example, must be guilty either of pretentiousness or incongruity. The handsome oak door which you discover to be only painted deal, stands convicted of fraud. The gorgeous marble door, which you know can only be painted wood is merely ridiculous.

In many instances the right and wrong of imitation is not so obvious. The use of veneer has been

most indiscriminately condemned; but it is rather the abuse of it that deserves to be denounced. There can be no occasion to deny ourselves the luxury of rich marble on our walls because we cannot possibly construct them of it throughout. If we could do so it would be a wanton burying of beautiful colour. No sane person would expect the walls of S. Mark's to be built of the precious material with which they are lined. When there is a possibility of misapprehension it would certainly be advisable that the baser stone or brickwork should come to the front occasionally and confess itself. It is a simple thing to embed veneers of marble on a wall in panels (with or without mosaic work) in such a way that no one could for a moment mistake it for anything but what it is.

In wood-work the abuse of veneer has been so shameless, one is almost prejudiced against its use at all. Yet it would be a pity that the beauty of rare wood should be sacrificed to a theory; and there is, besides, this real use in veneer, that by crossing the grain of veneers some danger of shrinkage and warping is met. Nothing could be more objectionable than the use of veneer on curved surfaces and in the framing of cabinet-work, but it would be arbitrary to deny the just use of veneered panels, if only the wood be rich enough to deserve cutting into thin slices. No one, probably, would be found to object on principle to veneer in the form of marquetry. There is even a charm about the very

frankness with which it confesses its shallowness. Nothing is left to be found out about it.

Concerning the decorative use of gilding it has been urged that it must logically be classed among the shams. And so it must where it is used to simulate solid gold, as where surface gilding is made to simulate damascening. But gilding, as it has been practised in architecture for centuries past, is used simply as colour is. A gilt moulding no more pretends to be of gold than a painted wall pretends to be of solid pigment. It neither deceives nor is meant to deceive. It is confessedly gold leaf. Nevertheless, it is at once a frank and an effective practice, to let the grain of oak or leather, or the texture of canvas or plaster, reveal itself beneath the gold.

Marquetry panel.

The farce of Pretence is not a new and original production of our day ; we have only adapted the old idea to modern circumstances. But the imitation in times past appears to have been of two

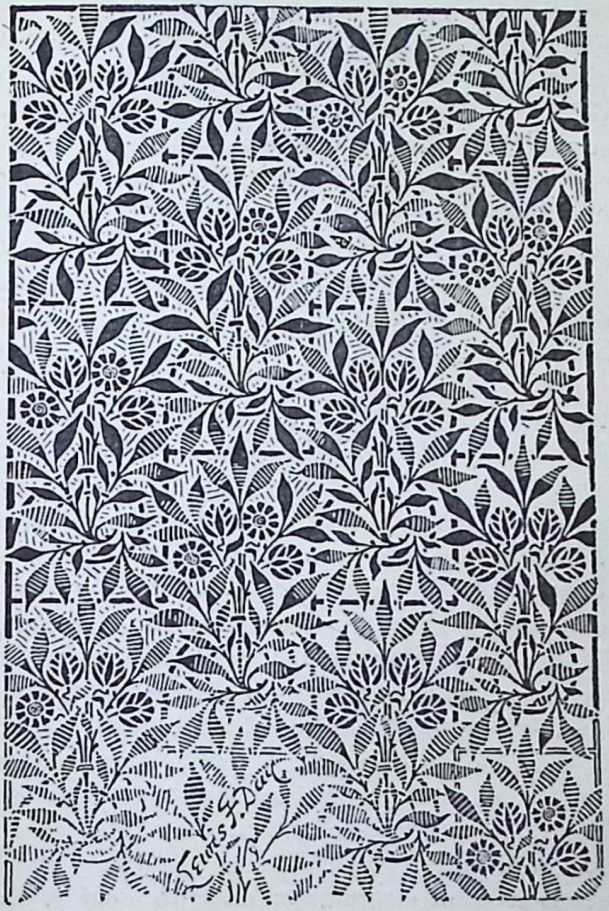
kinds, that which directly aimed at deception, and that which was rather meant to symbolise the thing it suggested. A familiar instance of the latter treatment occurs in the curtains painted as decoration on the walls of Gothic buildings. They are so conventionally rendered, and with such obvious disregard to realism, that they can never have been meant to do more than suggest the real hangings, with which it was the wont to furnish the walls of a room. The first of these painted curtains may have merited the praise due to a "conceit," but the repetition of the freak ceases to be amusing. Another favourite fancy of Gothic artists was the so-called "brick" or "masonry" pattern, a diaper formed on the lines taken by the mortar joints of a building. There is a considerable decorative use in the rigidity of these lines, but the notion of rigidity is all that we need borrow from masonry. There is no occasion whatever to adopt the forms and proportions of the stones used in construction.

Lines suggested by masonry.

The obvious appropriateness of tiles for the walls

of a bath-room, and the refreshing effect of them, has led to the common use of so-called "tile-papers" by those who cannot or will not afford the luxury of the real thing. Perhaps it has not occurred to them that this effect might just as well have been produced without resorting to the representation of the jointing of the tiles. A pattern printed on the white paper ground, or, still better, stencilled on the white walls, may have much of the cool and fresh appearance of tile-work; it may even with advantage be based on the square form of the ordinary tiles, so as indefinitely to suggest them, and thus through association afford additional satisfaction, without for a moment pretending to imitate them. The same may be said of other effects, that have from the first been copied in wall-paper. French wall-paper effaces itself in the endeavour to look like tapestry, brocade, cretonne, damask —apparently no matter what, so long as it does not look like what it is. Yet the effect might in all cases have been arrived at without simulation. We may take it that the imitator knows this well enough, but simply shirks the difficulty. Numberless are the expedients, more or less pretentious, that are adopted, and in the name of ornament, to save trouble and supply the place of skill.

Occasionally, a decorative device turns out to be less guilty of pretence than would appear at first sight—such for example as embossed "leather-paper" which is to some extent discredited by its



Based on square lines of tiles.

very name. It is a perfectly straightforward step towards the popularising of art, to reproduce by simpler and less costly means effects of decoration which were once beyond the means of all but the very few. Because embossing and gilding have been already applied to leather, that is no reason why they should not be further applied to paper or any other substance that may be adapted to the process; and the fact of that prior application of the process does not justify the charge of pretence against those who have the wit to discover a wider field for its application.

The excuse for frank imitation lies sometimes in its very frankness. The Japanese have a passion for imitation; they delight in it for its own sake apparently; they imitate anything and everything, reproducing in the costliest material all the character of a commoner substance. They will carve a tusk of ivory into the semblance of a bit of common bamboo—there is at least no suggestion of cheap display in that. However that may be, the Japanese use paper habitually where we should use leather, linen, or even wood. It would be difficult to say the use to which they have not put paper; and it would seem more just to say that they have developed the resources of paper, than to condemn them of pretence.

It is a point not always easy to decide, but certainly worth consideration, how far any rivalry of one material by another may be considered a

workmanlike development of its capacities, and how far it is a sham. Upon the solution of that question depends the justification of the artist. It is to be regretted that our earlier familiarity with embossing as applied to leather should suggest inevitably the idea of imitation when it comes to be applied to any other substance. If it were the *grain* of the leather that was imitated, then the case would be different. But there is no such natural connection between leather and embossing, as to preclude the embossing of any and every other substance that admits of it. Embossed leather is perhaps in its origin only an imitation of *repoussé* metal-work.

In connection with the subject of pretence, occurs the question as to how far one is justified in suggesting in painted decoration the appearance of relief. The theory of flat decoration for flat surfaces is logical enough, but it is possible to ride it too hard. Certainly a surface that ought to look flat, such as a floor, should not be enriched by the semblance of objects in relief; but it does not follow that all surfaces in which we are accustomed to flatness must, in the nature of things, be treated flatly; though the effect of any marked deviation from the accustomed treatment would probably not be pleasing. The walls of our dwelling rooms are flat for the simple reason that it is the readiest way of finishing them, the cheapest, the cleanliest, the easiest on which to hang pictures or aught else. Any attempt at the appearance of prominent relief

in a wall-pattern would be offensive, not simply on account of its deceptiveness, but because it would be sure to assert itself more than a background should. If, however, not aiming at relief, the designer should arrive at a satisfactory result, which somehow suggested slight and delicate relief, such as would not be otherwise than pleasing to the eye were it actually modelled, it would be dogmatic to declare that such an effect was not legitimate. We have to beware of bigotry. "The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," is a fiction of the law. Morally it may be desirable; socially it is impossible. The man who, in season and out of season, is perpetually parading his truthfulness, comes to be put down as a prig. Art, too, may be priggish. What we esteem in men and in their work is sincerity; and that is quite possible in every-day art as well as in every-day life. A real man puts himself into his work. There will be no falsity in his art, if he is honest.

If we speak without prejudice, we must admit that it is very difficult to define the limits of what is allowable. In some cases it is perhaps only the *intention* that determines whether an expedient is right or wrong.

A certain degree of downright imitation might not be altogether inexcusable if the motive were merely the laudable desire to bridge over some abrupt transition from ornament in bold relief to flat painted-decoration. If the choice lie only

between two evils, one is not to be blamed for choosing the lesser ; and incongruity is an evil, just as imitation is : which is the greater of the two may, in exceptional cases, be matter of dispute.

In mural decoration one is continually compelled to approach so far at least in the direction of imitation as to give in painting the *value*, if not the effect, of modelling or carving. If every builder were an artist, it would not be so. But every decorator has at times to balance constructed ornament by painted decoration, for which there should have been no occasion. In the attempt to accomplish this he may do something which is in danger of being mistaken for relief; in which case the fault should in justice be debited to the blunderer whose shortcomings he is endeavouring in all honesty to make good. Even then the *too ready* resort to imitation is a confession either of incompetence or laziness. Whoever is artist enough will find some mean between pretence and slovenliness.

We ask not only for honesty but for a certain amount of frankness in the use of materials. The degree to which such honesty and frankness should be carried, each one must determine according to his conscience and according to his temperament : feeling will often anticipate reason in pointing out the way that is right. Is it not always so ? The best of us are scarcely fit to inhabit a "Palace of Truth." Upright men who would scorn deliberately to lie, make concessions to social convenience which are

not consistent with strict truth. They would vindicate themselves, perhaps, by saying that in their lives they are truthful, and that it is only the literal truth which they appear to violate. And in art also, it is not so essential that our work should be true to the letter, as that it should be frank, honest, unpretending, workmanlike, obedient to the spirit of truth.

LEADING-STRINGS.

"The eagle never lost so much time as when he consented to learn of the crow."

IT MIGHT seem a simple thing to state broadly the principles that govern ornament; and, indeed, it is easy enough for an experienced workman to give some simple working rules that may be of use to the beginner; but these are not to be confounded with "principles" even though they be put forth on authority. The principles enunciated by Owen Jones in his 'Grammar of Ornament' are, strictly speaking, only a description of the lines on which that tasteful artist himself worked, plus certain dogmas deduced from his own practice. Now, the truths that appeal to us are not necessarily the highest nor the only truths: not every good working rule is to be accepted as a principle of design.

Dogmas are two-edged tools to play with. One

may go so far as to doubt if any good can come of dogmatism. When once a student has passed that first stage of art, where he has not to ask questions but to do what he is told and believe what he is taught, then the dicta of even the best of teachers are useful only in proportion to their elasticity. They must fit emergencies. Rigid dogma is more likely to hinder than to help the impulse of imagination.

It is not difficult to lay down general rules, if they are so general as to be of comparatively little practical use. One might safely say, for example, that ornament may be so schemed as either to *fill* or to *occupy* the space it is designed to decorate, instancing the Arabs and the Japanese as expert each in their own direction. When, however, we presume to lay down definite rules concerning the lines on which all ornament should be based, we are in danger of becoming ridiculous. It is one thing to recognise the value of the lesson conveyed to us in Moresque art, and another to deduce from it unalterable principles on which, ever afterwards, ornament must be designed.

Again, it will not be denied that the Moors made admirable decorative use of the primary colours qualified with much gold; and it is open to us to follow their precedent. But we are equally free to work on the principles of Titian, if we so prefer. There is, of course, no one road to success in anything. What we have to do is to produce good colour, no matter how some one else arrived at harmony, if

we do not see our way to it that way. Certainly no rules of any kind will make colourists of us.

The energetic advocacy of the use of primary colours in decoration tempts one to wish it were possible, once for all, to wipe them from the palette of all but the most expert; for it is only the most expert that can safely be trusted with anything so poisonous as the raw primaries.

The doctrine of the use of primary colours must needs be supplemented by other doctrines equally arbitrary. "Colours should never be allowed to impinge upon each other"; they must occupy certain set positions; they must be doled out in certain "proportions"! Certainly, if you *will* take neat primary tints, you must take also sundry precautions lest those powerful irritants should be too much for you. But if the primaries are so dangerous why take such pains to employ them?

A colourist finds it necessary to hold on to no thread of theory for safety; he can do better than any theorist, without it. He delights to disturb the monotony of a blue surface by touches of green and grey and purple; he brightens a red with dashes of orange, and blurs it in places with brown; a flat tint he accepts only as a necessary compromise; and he makes use of the primaries, as the physician makes medicinal use of poisons, knowing that any excess or indiscretion in their employment may be fatal.

Most of the dogmas as to the proportions in

which the various colours should be used, are based upon the fact, or fancy, that a ray of sunlight is divisible into coloured rays in those proportions. We were taught in childhood that the seven colours of the rainbow went to make white light; later, we learnt that there were three primary colours, although there was some doubt among scientists as to what those three were; we have since been asked to believe that there are only two primaries. At all events, Nature (who has on the whole not a bad eye for colour) has very carefully concealed from us the component parts of white light. It is of infinite importance to the astronomer and the chemist to resolve colourless light into its elements; but the spectroscope is not likely to revolutionise art, or even greatly to help the artist. Dissect and analyse as much as you like, you cannot draw up any formula guaranteeing the production of fine colour.

There is just this fact in connection with the theories of colour proportion, that the eye can bear as a rule more of those colours which preponderate in the spectrum. We can endure, that is to say, more of blue than of red, and more of red than of yellow; but any rule as to the ratio in which colours should be used is as futile as it is arbitrary. The very test of good colour is that it is too subtle to be put into words. Only the coarser, cruder tints, those which can be quite clearly defined, come within the scope of the theorist. Some trouble might doubtless be spared us, if we could

consent to shut our eyes, and swallow obediently some such formula as this:—"Take three parts of yellow pigment, five of red, and eight of blue; distribute evenly over a surface geometrically subdivided into small spaces, with care that no two colours impinge; sugar with orientalism, flavour with conventionality at discretion, and serve up boldly in the form of ornamental art!" But how is one to arrive at a pure primary colour? Our pigments do not approach the purity of the prism. And how shall we measure them? The eye must be judge. Better by far trust to it altogether, and dispense with the encumbrance of a theory.

FORM AND COLOUR.

"No man can serve two masters."

THE THEORY that colour should always emphasise form will not bear examination. That that is one use to which colour may be put is obvious. To insist, however, that the development of form is the one and only function of colour, is more than rash. One may be permitted so to distribute colour as to emphasise only the forms in need of emphasis.

Purity of form needs certainly no "development" by means of colour; it is best appreciated in the absence thereof; and, on the other hand, full, rich colour can afford to dispense with some grace in forms lending themselves to its satisfactory distribution. This is fully appreciated by painters, who habitually sacrifice one to the other, according as their aim is form or colour. Its appreciation by the decorator has perhaps been hindered by autho-

ritative dogma. Those consummate colourists, the Chinese, are not particular about the forms they employ, so long as they lend themselves to colour.

Old Chinese embroidery, the forms only a vehicle for colour.

All that can safely be asserted is, that in any scheme of colour there should be strict relation between its quality, its quantity, and its place

—that is to say, the quality of colour will be determined by the area it covers and its situation; the amount of colour will depend upon whether the tone is light or dark, whether the tints are rich or delicate, whether they are seen in strong light

Strongly defined form.

or in shadow, and so on. The contrast between Capricornus, above, and his background is none too sharp for the dark corner the panel was designed to occupy.

No need of much philosophy to tell us that the

cruder a colour the less we must use of it, and the more it should be broken up and separated from other crude colour; or to teach us that low tones are lost in dark places, where bright ones are only subdued to due sobriety and softness. The slightest feeling for colour will suggest that the larger the surface to be covered with one flat colour the lower it must be in tone (unless again it be in shadow), and that the smaller the surface the brighter it may be. Every house-painter knows by experience that for a ceiling he must mix his tint a shade or two lighter and brighter than he wishes it to appear; but to insist upon the adoption of one colour for projections, another for hollows, and a third for flat surfaces, is to prove oneself a theorist beyond redemption.

One need not even have studied Chevreul in order to know that some colours appear to advance and others to recede from the eye. Where it was desired to throw back one member of a moulding, we should naturally paint it in some colour approaching to greyness, and not bright orange; but it is by no means necessary in architectural decoration to exaggerate every projection and deepen every hollow, as if the architect had expressed himself so timidly that it was necessary for the decorator to underline his words. When architect and decorator are one, he wisely leaves it to the painting to supplement the modelling. He relies, perhaps upon colour to deepen hollows (as did the Greeks

when they made their curves so flat) perhaps upon the depth of the hollow to soften the crudity of available colours. This is more nearly the function of colour—to qualify form, defining or subduing it as need may be. In the design below, the dark colour behind the boys is used to emphasise their

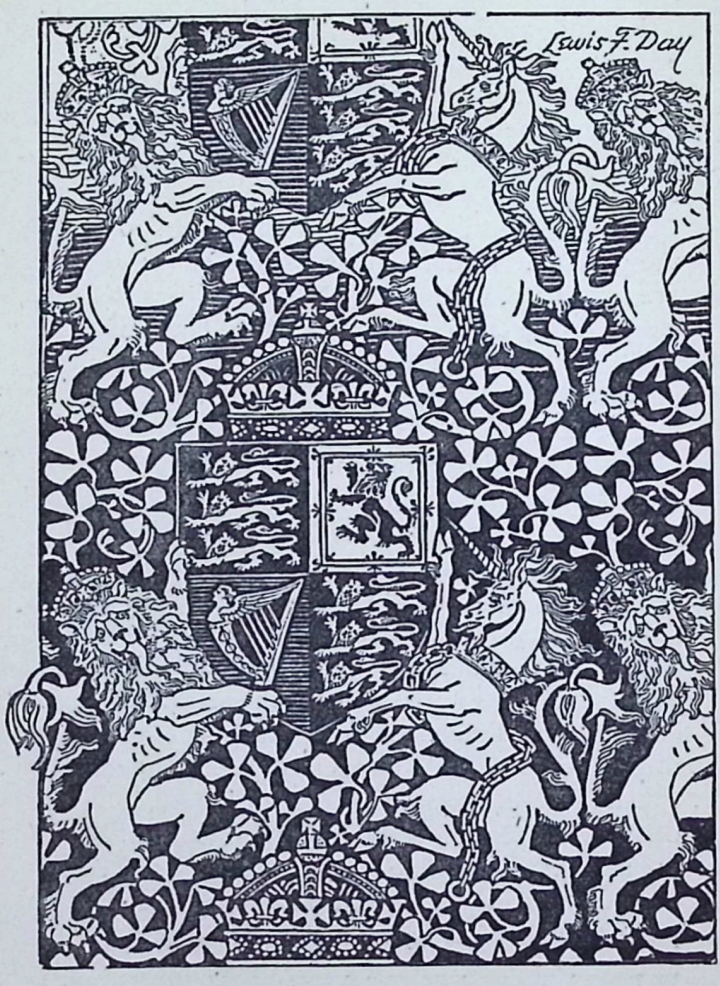
Colour used to modify form.

forms, and, at the same time, to confuse the form of the arabesque.

It may even be said that, art being in its nature experimental, and success by no means assured, one great use of colour in architecture (wherein form is of supreme importance) is often to correct and supplement it, to give variety to what is monotonous, emphasis to what is tame, and unity to what would otherwise be disjointed. In many of the plastic arts what is done is done, so far as they are concerned, and no modification is possible. A stroke of the chisel that has gone too far, cannot be recalled ; but if the work is to be painted it is the province of the painter to rectify the mistake that, but for him, would be beyond remedy.

The practical decorator, who has mostly to accept forms as they are and do the best he can with them, would be sorry indeed to have to emphasise by colour what is already only too aggressive. He is grateful to the tones that will enable him to do something towards subduing it.

The relation between the forms and colours he adopts is always in the mind of the artist. If there be not much difference between the shades of colour used, he sees that his forms shall be strong enough to take care of themselves ; unless, indeed, it be his deliberate intention that the pattern shall just break the monotony of a flat surface, without itself being obvious. (The pronounced pattern of the curtain pattern overleaf, is calculated not to be altogether lost even in one-coloured terry, where the contrast is only between the warp and the weft of the same



Hard form to be softened by very subdued colour.

dye.) On the other hand some patterns are meant to be felt by their influence rather than seen.

The analysis of the best work will show that in it perfect harmony has often resulted from the exclusion of one of the primary colours; and the timely recollection of that experience may suggest to the artist a way out of some immediate difficulty; but to formulate that experience into a rule for general guidance, would be only less pernicious than to insist upon the presence, always, of all the primaries.

We know very well that any considerable volume of one colour is kept in countenance by the support of some kindred colour in the composition, and that the occurrence of a solitary point of vivid colour is an invaluable means of emphasis. We feel that in the decoration of a room there should be some gradation upwards both of form and colour. It seems only natural that the deeper colour and the more rigid form should be at the base of the design, and that the tones should grow lighter and the lines freer as they ascend. There is no limit to the suggestions of experience; but who shall say that there is one way, and only one, of balancing or emphasising colour; or that a delightful effect of wall decoration may not be produced without upward gradation of colour, and without any severity of form whatever?

In the difficulties of design, every hint, however slight, is valuable; but all dogma is insupportable: the old work, on which it pretends to be founded,

was inspired by nothing of the kind. The cultivated instinct of the artist must be its own law. Let him dare to be true to his artistic conscience, and he can afford to despise the theorist and all his works.

It is impossible to reconcile all the claims of form and colour. The two work often together to their mutual gain. But, however friendly the rivalry between them, it is always rivalry, and each claims for itself something that the other would fain deny to it. It is seldom that they are found together in equal perfection; rather it would seem as if absolute perfection of the one were only to be obtained by some sacrifice of the other. There are, and have been in all times, men who in their work aim at combining the two qualities equally, and who have attained in both a measure of success; but they are just the men who fail to satisfy, either colourists in the matter of colour, or draughtsmen in the matter of form. And with respect to decorative art, what remains to us of ancient ornament goes to show that the masters of form are often those from whom the secret of colour is hidden, and that colourists are as frequently half contemptuous of form, making use of it merely to assist them in their effect of colour.

Perhaps the very pre-eminence of the Greeks in form was in some measure due to a defective appreciation of the beauty of colour. Mr. Gladstone's theory of the colour-blindness of the ancient Greeks may or may not be correct; but at least it seems

certain that Homer did not describe colour with the accuracy, nor yet with the appreciation of its infinite variety, common in modern poetry.

Too much stress must not be laid upon the verbal painting of colour by a poet, even though that poet be Homer; but it is at least corroborative of the more direct testimony of archaic Greek art. We see in that no vestiges of anything very beautiful or subtle in colour; nor in the work of centuries later, when Greek art was in its prime, does the colour appear to have passed beyond tasteful tinting. Nothing could well be more unpleasing (except to the imagination of a schoolboy) than some of their glassware, "marbled" mixtures suggestive only of sweetstuff. Nor is what we are told of the painting of their temples at all indicative of anything like tenderness of tone. In their terra cotta they certainly reached a stage of cultivated taste which, as far as it goes, is perfectly satisfactory; but it does not go much beyond monotone. Failing all proof of that full sense of colour which is so common among the nations of the East, we may be allowed to suspect that taste was the highest point to which they attained in this direction, a taste the more perfectly under control because they had no passion for colour.

It is scarcely logical to argue that, because the Greeks were so eminent in many things, they must have been pre-eminent in all. The fairer inference is that success in one direction was attained by a concentration of purpose that disregarded all

counter-attractions. Even in the poetry of the Greeks, is it not rather the form that is so admirable? Both evidence and presumption point to the fact that in Greek art perfection of form was not allied with equally splendid colour. Perhaps it could not have been otherwise, and the perfect purity of form was owing to perfect singleness of aim.

Colour, with its sensuous charm, did something towards blinding the artists of ancient Rome to the value and beauty of pure form. Though their work may have been, in a sense, a debasement of Greek art, we must admit at least that it was richer. The purity of Greek art has sometimes the air of being slightly cold-blooded; and there are moods in which one can sympathise with the Romans losing patience with its calm faultlessness, and breaking out into reckless excess.

In the Renaissance the culmination of colour was accompanied by almost equal magnificence of form; but the latter had not the refinement of the best Greek art; and, certainly so far as ornament was concerned, the purest form was always in monochrome, carved in wood or marble, or wrought in metal.

The key of colour in the earlier art of Egypt appears to have been pitched higher than in that of Greece, and its success was less uniformly assured. It is true that, though among the Egyptians both form and colour were strictly subordinate to symbolism, in the ornaments which decorate the ancient

mummy cases both are usually excellent; but it is more than probable that the colour was originally much cruder than it is now that the varnish which preserves it is yellow with age; and even at its best it is not luxurious. What most impresses us always in Egyptian ornament, is its dignified restraint.

Where colour is indeed superlatively fine, as in the art of China, it reigns alone. The forms employed in Chinese ornament fulfil their intention; they afford scope for harmony which could not be nearly so readily obtained by the use of shapelier masses; but in themselves they are not remarkable for grace. Plainly draughtsmanship was never the forte of the Chinese.

The superiority of the Japanese in this respect is about in proportion to their inferiority in the colour sense. Even the Japanese have rather an appreciation of what is essential and expressive than of what is graceful in form; they select always those lines which are characteristic in preference to those which are beautiful.

Never was the balance between form and colour held so evenly as in the hands of the artists, whatever their race, who are responsible for what is called "Arab" art. The forms in use among them are, without doubt, far less pure than the Greek, and the colour is wanting in what may be called emphasis; but it would be hard to find ornament in which both form and colour are at once so good in

themselves and so harmoniously combined as in the surface decoration of, for example, the Alhambra. Neither is sacrificed to the other; we are even left in doubt as to which was the predominating influence in design, form or colour.

Gothic art comes more nearly home to us. But with all our reverence for the grandeur of mediæval architecture, it must be confessed that even the most beautiful forms of thirteenth century ornament are rude in comparison with Greek or Renaissance detail, whilst the finest colour of the period was associated with forms the very reverse of beautiful. The most ardent admirer of Early-English glass-painting will not claim for the stiff-jointed, splay-footed saints of the period any other merit of form than that of embodying fine colour; and any colourist who has studied old glass must acknowledge that many of its most magnificent effects are due, in part at least, to time and accident. The action of the elements has corroded and roughened the surface of the glass, in such a way as to refract the light transmitted through it as no smooth surface could; and the mellowness of old glass is in no small measure due to this. To some extent it is due also to the lichen that encrusts it on the outside, to the monster cobwebs that fall in dusky curtains from the bars of windows out of reach, to the thick setting of accumulated dust and dirt round every lead, from which the colours shine out with

jewel-like brilliance, and even to the accident of capricious mending and patching and misplacement of glass by glaziers before the days of "restoration." Admitting all the beauty of old glass we cannot take it as proof of the universal excellence of Gothic colour. The illuminated manuscripts, preserved with a care that is less than kind, tell a different tale, a tale for the most part of a crudity that can only be described as childish. Nor do the remains of mediæval wall-painting give us a very high idea of the power of the artists. Their safety lay in the discreet use of ochre and other simple earths, with which they could not go far wrong.

It is not here the purpose, however, to disparage Gothic or any other colour, but to show that the perfections of form and colour are seldom twin-born. Nowadays, as always, an artist according to his idiosyncrasy, looks upon form as a vehicle for colour, or upon colour as it may influence form. His best chance of success in either is in the subordination of the other to it; and it behoves him to know clearly which it is that he desires to attain, and to give his mind to that, not ignoring the other, nor being content to do work that is in any respect bad, only doing always the best that is compatible with his main purpose.

It is characteristic of strength not to believe in the impossible. But much modern art fails because it attempts too much—seeks to combine qualities

which are irreconcilable, the one, it may be, counteracting the other. In art, as elsewhere, singleness of aim is essential to success. To spread yourself in two directions is to run a double risk of failure. The fate of those who would serve two masters was long since foretold.

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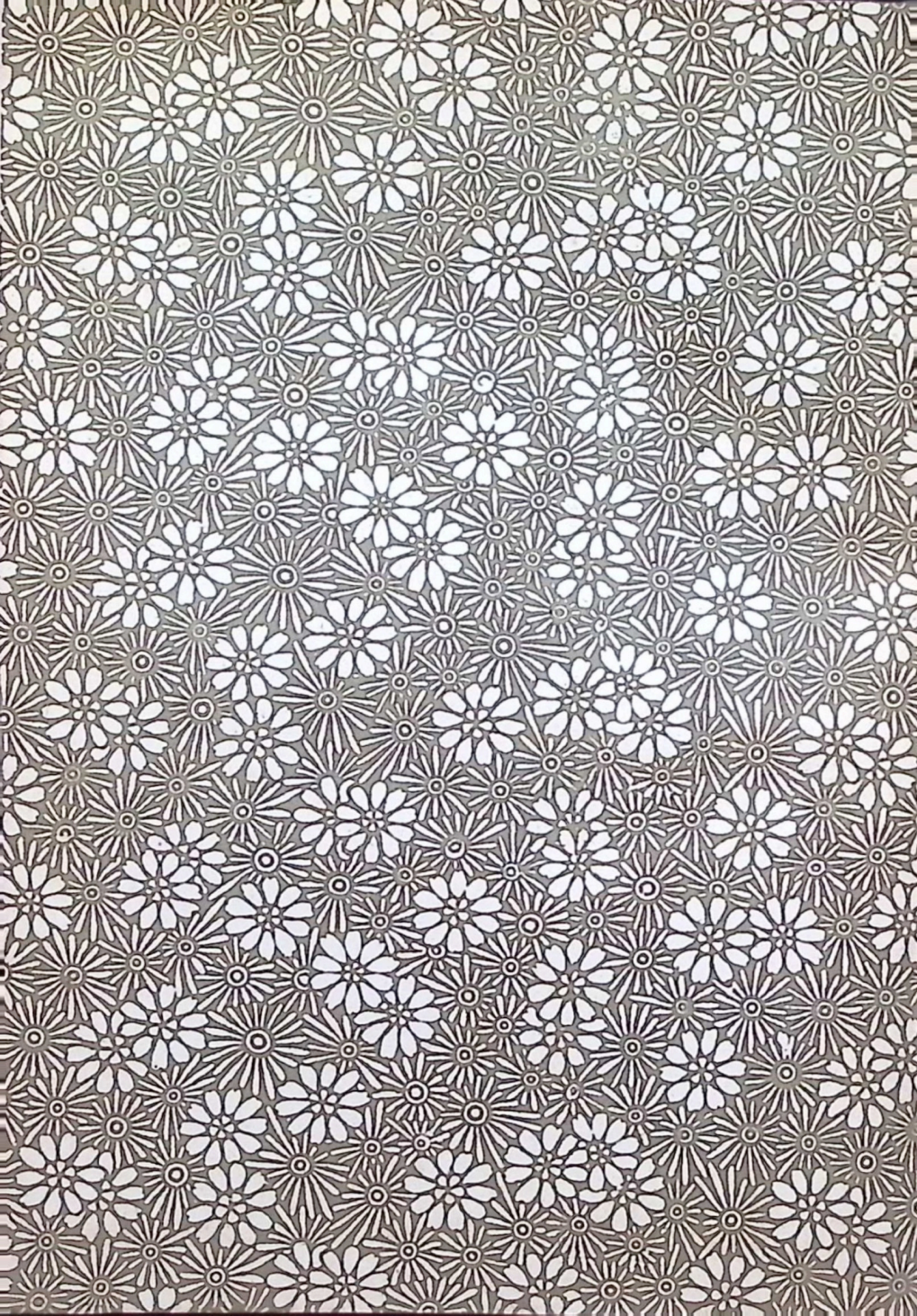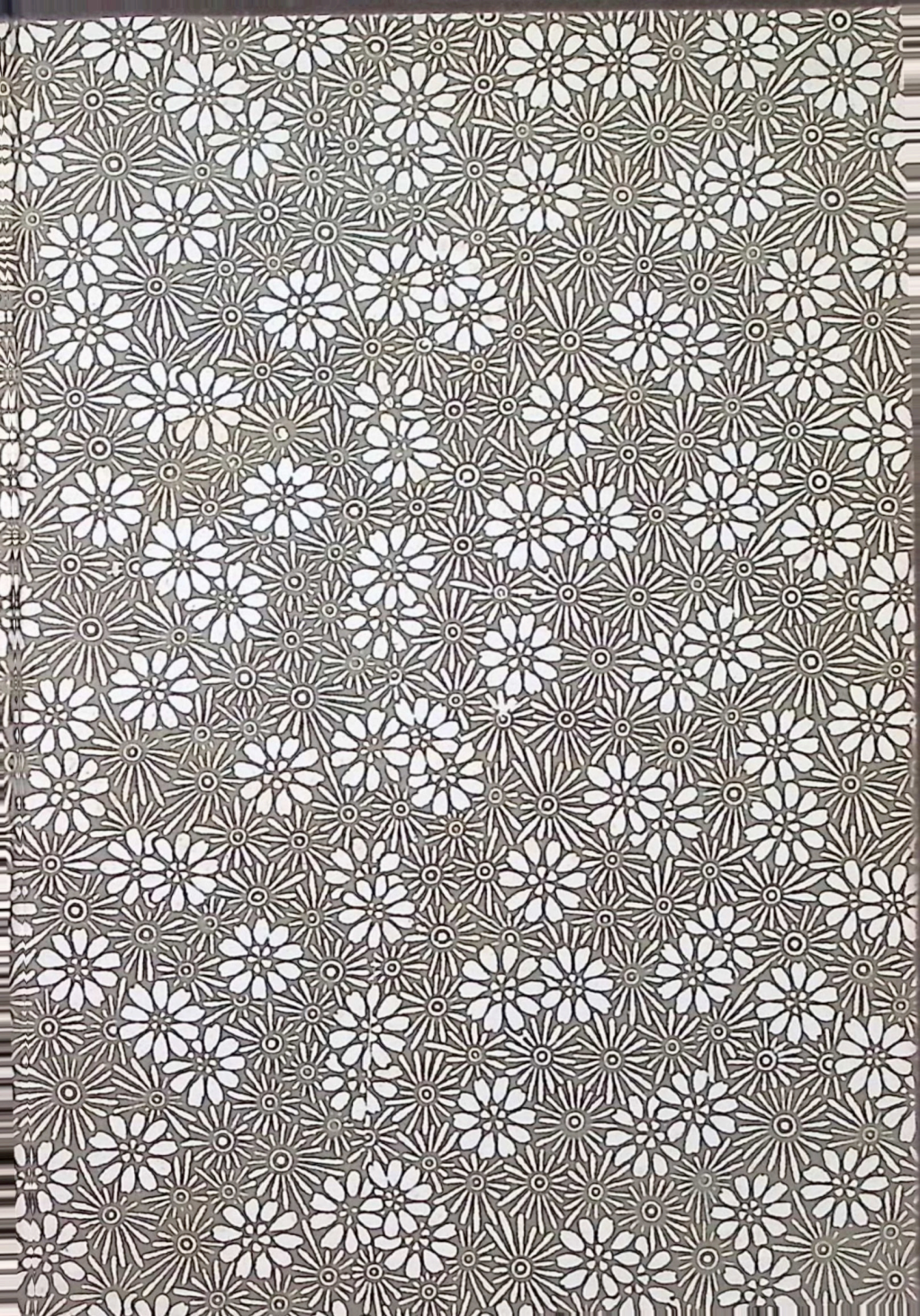
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